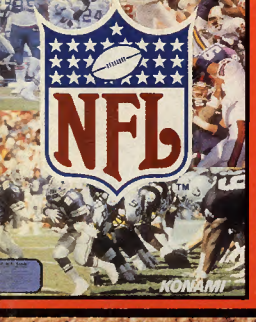

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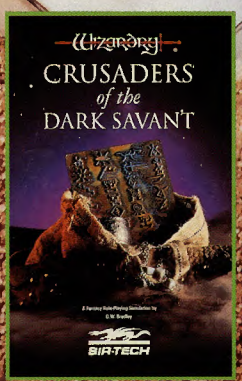

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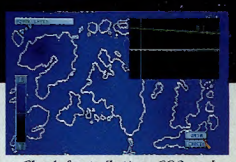

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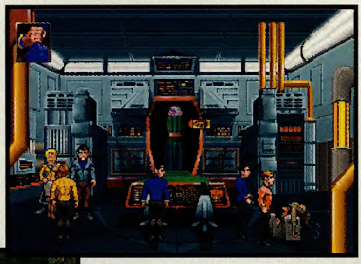

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GAME PLAYERS PC Entertainment

MAY/JUNE 1992

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Game Players PC *Entertainment* (ISSN-1059-2180) is published bi-monthly by GP Publications, Inc., 23-00 Route 208, Fair Lawn, NJ 07410, USA. Newsstand distribution is handled by the Curtis Circulation Company. Subscriptions: One year (6 issues) US: $14.95. Canada: $22.42. Canadian price includes postage and GST (GST #128220688). Add $2.00 per issue outside US and Canada.

For customer service, write *Game Players* Customer Service Dept., P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, NC 27429. Postmaster please send change of address to *Game Players PC Entertainment*, P.O. Box 29364, Greensboro, NC 27429.

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GP Publications, Inc., also publishes the *Game Players Nintendo (tm) Guide (tm)*, *Game Players Sega Genesis Strategy Guide*, and *Game Players Encyclopedias* covering Nintendo, Sega, and PC games.

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EDITOR'S NOTES

At a time when many segments of the economy are still struggling to stay afloat, it appears that the PC software industry is weathering the recession remarkably well. While cartridge-based gaming software suffered from sluggish sales in 1991, both education and entertainment PC software sales showed impressive gains.

That success has translated into a steady flow of new releases, and we've expanded our coverage to keep you up-to-date on the latest titles. This issue has more GameByte reviews than ever before, and the info you'll find in them is the result of hands-on play by our editors, not merely reworded press releases like you sometimes find in other PC gaming magazines.

We've also included some sneak peeks and previews of titles that are slated to hit the market very soon. Two of the most exciting are *NFL* from Konami and *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, the latest installment in Sir-Tech's Wizardry series. Neil Randall has been exploring Lost Guardia, the setting for *Dark Savant*, and you can find out what he discovered on page 32. Pete Scisco's scouting report of *NFL* is on page 30.

NFL looks very promising, but it's a little hard to think of football with a new baseball season under way. And just in time for it is *Al Michaels Announces Hardball III*, the newest edition in Accolade's best-selling series of baseball simulations. With play-by-play commentary by Michaels and more features and options than you shake a bat at, *Hardball III* brings this highly acclaimed series into the nineties with a bang. Check out Lance Elko's story on page 26.

Capping off this issue is our expanded PC News section. Be sure to read our inside information on the latest developments in PC software and hardware to keep on top of this rapidly changing market.

We hope you enjoy the issue, and we look forward to bringing you even bigger and better coverage in the future.

Stephen Poole
Associate Editor

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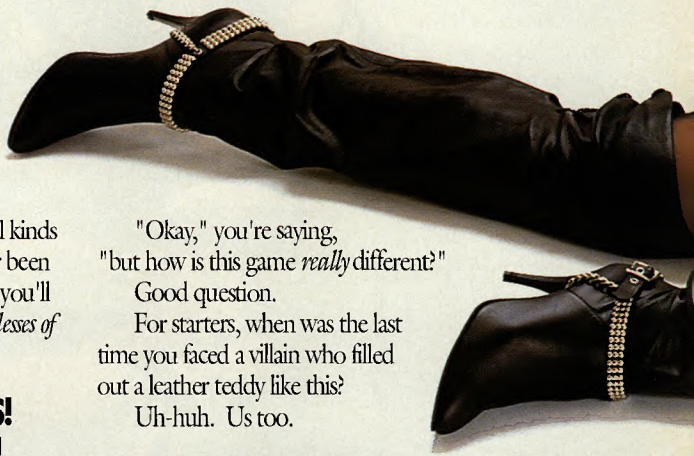

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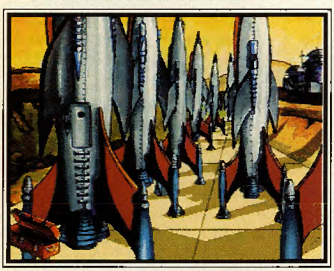

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SNEAK PREVIEW

HEROES OF THE 357TH

If one of your favorite things to do in a military aircraft simulation is strafe ground targets, *Heroes of the 357th*, from **Electronic Arts**, may be the game you've been looking for. You might even say that it does for ground-attack scenarios what *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* did for dogfighting.

Not that there aren't dogfights in *Heroes*, but almost any air-combat simulation that comes out now is going to suffer in comparison with *Yeager*. As a ground-attack simulation, however, this game really comes into its own.

Based on the real-life adventures of one of the hardest-flying, hardest-partying fighter squadrons in the European Theater of Operations, *Heroes of the 357th* straps you into the all-purpose workhorse of the European war, the P-51 Mustang, and sends you aloft on a wide variety of missions.

For a quick and dirty taste of action, you can't beat the practice mission where you head out on a barge-busting run on the Seine River. Using the Eiffel Tower as a landmark, you come in low over the water, get the barge in your sights, and walk the bullet-splashes right into it. Other gratifying ground

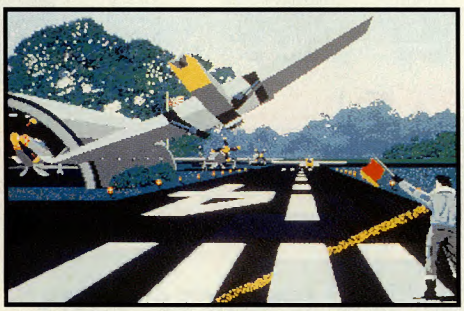
targets include airdromes, bridges, and steam locomotives. Anti-aircraft opposition can range from insignificant to murderous, and there's always the possibility that you'll be jumped by some lurking FW-190s or Bf- 109s.

For a really challenging mission, you can try to intercept and shoot down a V-1 buzz-bomb. Just don't be too close to one when it blows up.

Graphically, *Heroes* shows considerable imagination (down to the use of simulated grainy, black-and-white movie footage for the mission briefings).

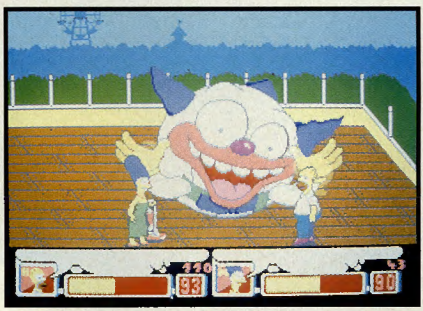
You can fly single missions or generate a character for the whole campaign, with the dual purpose of staying alive and achieving the status of ace. Historical aces are included, too, if you want to pattern yourself after a real hero of the 357th.

— William R. Trotter



THE SIMPSONS ARCADE GAME

This **Konami** game pits everyone's favorite prime-time family against the diabolical Montgomery Burns and his faithful servant Smithers, along with just about everyone else in Springfield. It all starts when the Simpsons decide to take a walk downtown. They get caught in the middle of a jewel heist, and young Maggie ends up holding a precious diamond. With no time to spare, the crook grabs her and dashes down the street. It's up to her family to catch the crook and rescue Maggie.



Just as the title suggests, *The Simpsons Arcade Game* is a direct translation of its coin-op counterpart — and I do mean *direct*. This version includes everything you'll find in the arcade version, with one exception — you can't have four people playing at the same time (there is a two-player mode, however). You can play as either Homer, Marge, Bart, or Lisa. Each fights in his or her own characteristic way, but they're all equally strong.

The game looks and feels just like the TV show — even the introduction is modeled on the show's opening scenes. The graphics are rendered in the same style as the show, and the characters move and act like their TV counterparts.

There are eight stages in all, and each location has been used on the series. You'll also recognize several cameo appearances by such memorable characters as Krusty the Clown, Blinky the 3-Eyed Fish, and even Binky, the star of Matt Groening's *Life in Hell* comics. Huge boss characters and bonus stages round out the game.

If you're a Simpsons' fan, you're guaranteed to like this side-scrolling action game. Its distinctive Simpsons' flavor makes it a classic for true buffs. Play controls are quite manageable, and the difficulty level challenges without frustrating. If you ever wondered what it would be like if the Simpsons went berserk and took on the whole town of Springfield, here's a good way to find out.

—Chris Slate

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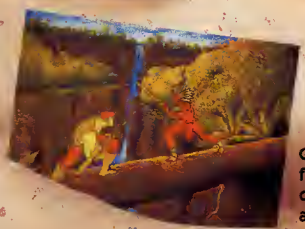

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NCAA BASKETBALL: ROAD TO THE FINAL FOUR

They call it "March Madness" — days and weeks of NCAA basketball that end with the crowning of a national champion. If you've got the basketball jones, this is what you've been waiting for all year.

Bethesda Softworks, the folks who brought *Wayne Gretzky Hockey* to the PC, attempt to capture the flavor of the NCAA tournament with *Road to the Final Four*. But the attempt, like a free throw off that caroms off the front of the rim, comes up short.

Based on the 1991 tournament, *Road to the Final Four* places 64 teams in a race for the championship. Write your own Cinderella story and try to beat Duke to take the crown, or see if you can upset a phenomenal UNLV team to make it to the Final Four. Single-game matchups are also allowed, if you don't want to play the entire tournament.

Player performances are based on statistics from the 1990-91 season and accurately determine how well each player performs in a game. During the tournament, accumulated stats are available for each player.

Once you move away from the statistical component, *Final Four* grows tiresome rather quickly. Graphically, the game is woefully outdated, even with its digitized animation. The background scenes (court, sidelines, bench, stands) are either poorly designed or nonexistent. Aside from a feature which lets you toggle through ten different camera angles, there's little to celebrate in the way *Final Four* appears on your PC. If the game screens look familiar, it's because they were designed by Mirage Graphics, the folks who created the controversial look of Electronic Arts' *Earl Weaver Baseball II*.

Game control includes coach-only and coach-and-play modes. Unfortunately, the game's arcade elements — passing, dribbling, shooting, blocking, stealing — just don't come alive on the floor. *Final Four* plays better as a coach-only game, in which you make substitutions, pick offensive and defensive patterns, and let the computer control the players.

Poor graphics and difficult game control are the undoing of an otherwise very good strategy sports simulation. It's too bad that such attention to statistical analysis and realistic performance could not be captured in a more attractive and playable game.

—Peter Scisco

CASTLES — THE NORTHERN CAMPAIGN

A quick, glib review of this first add-on campaign disk for **Interplay**'s *Castles* would read something like this: it gives you, for a not-inconsiderable amount of money, some of the features that *should* have been included in the original *Castles*.

Glibness aside, are the new features incorporated in *The Northern Campaign* enough to warrant the purchase? Depending on how much you liked *Castles* to begin with, the answer is a resounding "maybe."

Gender-conscious players will be gratified to note that when you elect to be a queen, you are represented by an impressive queenly graphic (the original game showed a bearded ruler regardless of whether you chose to be king or queen).

The tactically minded will be happy to learn that they can now exercise more control over their garrisons — holding some units in reserve and then unleashing them for a decisive stroke. Your enemies also show more realism and sophistication in their tactics: sometimes they attack under cover of archers, sometimes they attack in waves. Troop-training is now possible, and most monarchs will find it worth the time and money — an "elite" garrison can be smaller and therefore cheaper to maintain than one composed of average troops.

Decision-making requires a bit more subtlety in this campaign than in the original: the scale of political activities is larger, there are many new messenger screens to cope with, and it's not quite so easy to second-guess the cause-and-effect patterns behind your monarch's choices.

There's also a new economic element in this campaign scenario, permitting you to buy and sell land and other commodities. Careful bean-counting can provide modest profits and a comforting surplus of food and wine, but don't expect to accumulate a fortune through shrewd speculation — medieval economies were marginal affairs at best.

All of these features add to the texture of the basic game; whether they add up to enough of an improvement to justify the asking price is something every *Castles* player will have to decide individually.

—William R. Trotter

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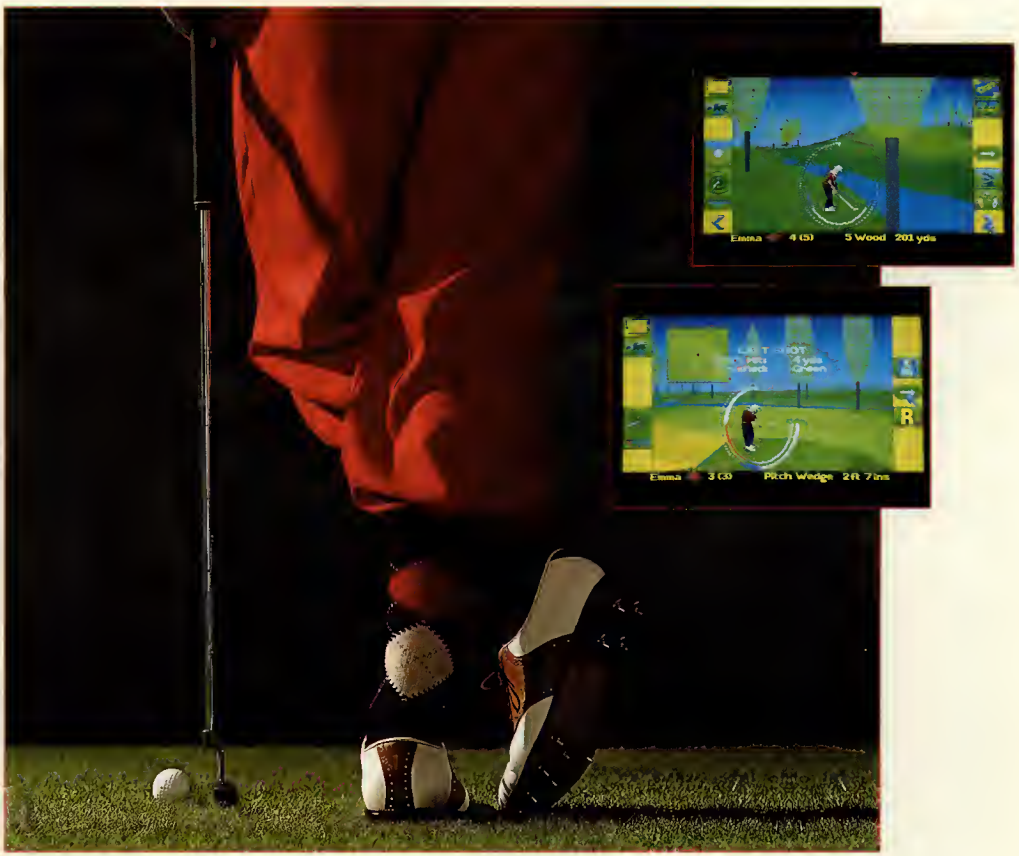

Actual screens may vary.

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Sneak Preview

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES: MANHATTAN MISSIONS

Even though the turtles have starred in what seems like a zillion different games for virtually every electronic game format on the market, it seems that there's always room for one more. The latest installment, *Manhattan Missions* from **Konami**, is one of the best yet. It offers great graphics, a huge number of missions, and solid game play.

As always, the notorious Foot clan is behind all the trouble. Under the leadership of the evil Shredder, they're taking over the city block by block -- and in no time they'll control all of Manhattan. The turtles are the city's last hope, but they'll have to move fast because they have only 48 hours until Shredder emerges victorious. During that time, the turtles must follow any leads they can find. They do this by watching the newscast delivered by their friend April O'Neil. When she reports a crime, the turtles are on the case. The turtles also get help from their pal, Casey Jones, who rescues them if they're injured.

While controlling the turtles takes a little practice, it won't be long before the ancient arts of ninjitsu become second nature. The combat scenes require a bit of strategy, which is a welcome change from most hack 'n slash games in which the only rule of battle is to hit your opponent first. There's also a wide variety of enemies, ranging from Foot clan soldiers to dinosaur terrorists from outer space. It's this kind of outrageous fantasy that made the turtles so successful in the first place.

Although the subject matter of this game obviously leans toward younger players, *Manhattan Missions* is a lot of fun no matter what your age. Play difficulty is only slightly higher than kid level—for example, you regain all your health each time you bring the turtles home. Because time is of the essence, the key to success is knowing when and when not to rest. The *Manhattan Missions* is an excellent arcade-strategy game, and quite possibly the best Turtles game yet.

— Chris Slate

LAURA BOW IN: THE DAGGER OF AMON RA

Laura Bow has come a long way from the Louisiana plantation setting of *The Colonel's Bequest*. When a valuable museum artifact is stolen, Laura, now a full-fledged journalist with the *New York Tribune*, is assigned to cover the story. Little does she realize that burglary will soon lead to murder.

Like *The Colonel's Bequest*, *Amon Ra* is divided into acts, and Laura must accomplish certain things before the action advances.

You spend the first quarter of *The Dagger of Amon Ra* (the debut title in Sierra's new series titled "The Laura Bow Mysteries") searching the Big Apple of 1926. Laura must talk to the police, seek out an informant in a speakeasy, and patrol the docks looking for clues. She needs to find an evening dress, too, so she can attend a fund-raiser at the museum.

Sierra developed its icon-driven interface system after Laura's last outing, so her sleuthing in this game takes a slightly different form. As she questions people and uncovers clues, information is automatically recorded in her trusty notebook, making it a snap for players to peruse evidence at any point in the game.

Laura has a new look as well. Her no-nonsense collegiate appearance in *The Colonel's Bequest* has given way to a buxom Gibson-girl look—the better to eavesdrop by, perhaps? One thing that hasn't changed, though, is her dangerously snoopy manner. During the fund-raiser, a corpse is discovered in a museum mummy case, and before long Laura finds herself the hunted as well as the hunter.

As in *The Colonel's Bequest*, Laura has but a single night to crack the case. Is the murderer the newly installed president of the museum? The eccentric curator? The suspicious security guard? Or could it be Steve, the handsome dock worker? Only the dedicated gamer will discover the truth.

—Leslie Mizell

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Sneak PreView

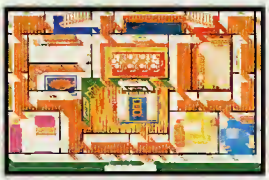
SOLITAIRE'S JOURNEY

Until now, solitaire fans had two good choices in computer games: *Solitaire Royale* from Spectrum HoloByte and *Hoyle Book of Games, Volume Two: Solitaire* from Sierra. Both are great programs, but each has its limitations. *Solitaire Royale* offers only eight versions of solitaire, and it has no automatic play feature. *Hoyle* has 28 different games, but there's no way to take back a move, and it doesn't have the tournament feature that makes *Solitaire Royale* so much fun.

That's all changed, thanks to **Quantum Quality Productions (QQP)**, whose *Solitaire's Journey* could well be the solitaire game to end all solitaire games — it takes the best features of every computer card game and rolls them into one. You can choose from 108 different games, select the deck of your liking, play in one of eight kinds of five-game tournaments, play randomly selected games, reverse moves, customize screen colors, and more — about the only things you can't do in *Solitaire's Journey* are bake a cake and weed the lawn.

Statistics are compiled for every solitaire game you play, allowing you to compare them in a graph of your personal history. Top scores in tournaments and other modes of play are recorded as well.

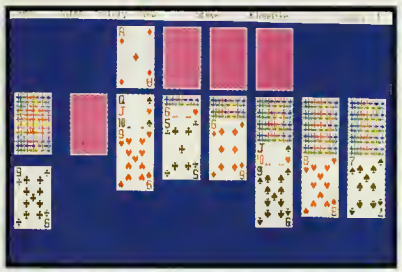
Solitaire's Journey has two interesting play modes in addition to tournaments and random selections. In Quest mode, you enter one of four houses, "searching" each room by playing one of three solitaire games, and uncovering keys to locked rooms. The object is to



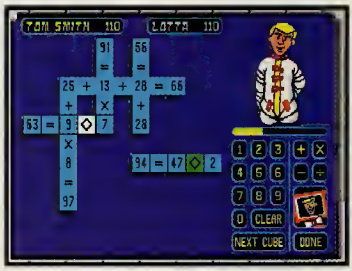
reach the exit of each house by traveling the shortest distance. In the Journey mode, you take one of four trips across the U.S., buying tickets for each leg of the trip with money earned in one of three solitaire games. Neither of these modes is intrusive; instead, they provide new ways to enjoy the broad appeal of the game.

The only negative aspect of *Solitaire's Journey* is that it might become responsible for broken marriages, neglected jobs, and, quite possibly, serious "mouse finger" injuries. Solitaire fans *won't* be able to stop playing.

— Leslie Mizell



MUTANOID MATH CHALLENGE



Dressing up drill and practice routines with arcade action and cute graphics is hardly a new phenomenon, but *Mutanoid Math Challenge*, from **Legacy Software**, takes the genre to new heights of silliness.

It seems that the Mutanoids, a group of aliens composed mostly of our castoff junk, are determined to cover the earth with green glop. Fortunately for us, Prime, the smartest lifeform in the universe, has convinced them to challenge us to a math contest instead. If the Mutanoids win, they get to slime us. If the earth wins, then the Mutanoids get slimed.

The contest is scheduled to take place in Cubix Cantina, a seedy joint located somewhere in outer space, and you have been chosen to represent earth. The game board resembles a partially played scrabble game, covered in tiles containing pieces of incomplete equations (? + 5 = 10, for instance). You alternate turns with the alien challengers, gaining points by correctly completing the equations. To permanently defeat the aliens, you'll have to win a randomly chosen number of games, from 15 to 35. But you can "glop" them much earlier by winning 3 out of 5 games in the individual tournaments.

With names like Little John (he's mostly toilet bowl) and Perky (she's part coffee pot) it's easy to understand why the alien competitors are so nasty. They sneer and whine constantly, making silly excuses for their poor performances. The frequent interchanges are amusing and the puns are often exaggerated but always right on target.

Mutanoid Math Challenge is attractive, with several levels of difficulty and the occasional word problem. But the limited music is irritating, and the game action never varies. Math errors are identified quickly but never explained, and the program doesn't even give you a chance to correct your mistakes. This lack of focused, repetitive practice makes *Mutanoid Math Challenge* seem more like a strategy game with a math motif rather than a sophisticated drill and practice program.

Mutanoid Math Challenge may provide your youngster with a pleasant alternative to more hardcore educational products, but don't expect it to teach math facts. You'll need a different program for that.

—Leslie Eiser

SWAP

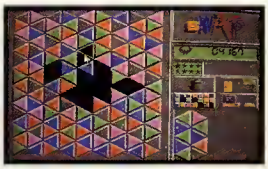
This one's for puzzle gamers only. A European import from **Titus**, *Swap* won't win any awards for originality, but it will offer plenty of challenge. Simply put, it's a good game.

The premise is simple. Swap two colored tiles to move like-colored pieces into adjacent positions, and the like-colored adjacent tiles will disappear. To complete a level, you must clear the board of tiles. Like most good puzzle games, it's easy to play, but hard to master.

Swap is a progressive game in which each new board is more difficult than the one before. But there's a catch — the program decides whether you've played skillfully enough to advance. If you haven't, you must start over. If you've cleared the board but struggled, you might advance one level — clear it smartly and efficiently, and you might jump several levels. Essentially, the more tiles you destroy with the fewest number of moves, the higher your score, and the faster your advance.

A number of extra features give the game an added strategic dimension. You can select both Undo (to take back a move) and Avalanche (to drop all tiles down into available spaces) at any level of play. At selected levels, you receive a stockpile of supplementary tiles you can insert appropriately, and at higher levels, a time limit is imposed. Also at the higher levels, you'll have to deal with a progressively greater number of colors, making it even more difficult to find a move that's truly effective.

The extra features are handy, but most of them cost you precious points — and points are what you need to



advance to higher levels. For example, a swap costs two points, a supplementary tile costs 10, and an Avalanche costs 100.

Don't restrict your strategy to removing one pair of colored tiles at a time: it's like spinning a wheel. Since a swap costs two points and destroying a tile gains one point, a one-pair swap is a wash: nothing's gained or lost.

While *Swap* doesn't have the powerfully addictive quality of a *Tetris*, it has its own charm. If your tastes run toward mind-bogglers or puzzle games, *Swap* is a solid choice.

—*Lance Elko*

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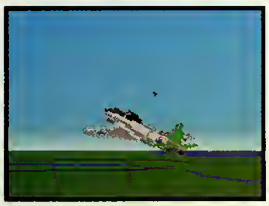
TOUR OF DUTY: P-80 SHOOTING STAR

Fans of **Lucasfilm Games'** award-winning *Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe* already know that the simulation recreates the fierce aerial engagements over Western Europe during World War II. And even if you've never played *Secret Weapons*, it's obvious from the title that you can expect a lot of "what-if" scenarios involving aircraft that either flew a short time at the end of the war end of war or only reached prototype stages of development.

Fitting nicely into the "what-if" scenarios is *P-80 Shooting Star*, the second in Lucasfilm's Tour of Duty add-in modules for use with *Secret Weapons*. The P-80, America's first operational jet fighter, arrived shortly before the end of the war in Europe and saw only limited service. The new Lucasfilm module assumes the war against Nazi Germany did not actually end in May 1945, but continued into the summer. Thus, the "historical" missions in the P-80 module are speculations on the type of combat environment this new jet *might* have seen.

Knowledgeable desktop pilots should be forewarned that what you are piloting in this module is the P-80A which, while fast and nimble, was not up to the later Korean-era P-80C model. The German ME-262 and GO-229 jets that turn up in the game in uncomfortably large numbers possess capabilities that rival or exceed those of the P-80.



As with the original game and the *P-38 Lightning* module (Lucasfilm's first Tour of Duty disk), the basic approach remains the same. Cockpit instrumentation features the same format and functions, and missions are structured in much the same way. A series of 16 "canned" Flight School, Historical, and Custom missions in the module provide ample opportunities to try out this new bird in a variety of escort, interceptor, and ground attack roles. The five Custom missions give you a chance to fly each of the Luftwaffe fighter types against the new fighter. You can also use the Mission Builder sequence to create your own custom missions or add these types to a campaign covering a series of engagements.

As with the P-38 module, the new P-80 presents you with a sky full of keen-sighted, aggressive adversaries possessing superb flying and gunnery skills. *Secret Weapons* fans will definitely want to add the new P-80 module to their libraries.

—Jim Thomas

THE CHESSMASTER 3000

Just when I think *The Chessmaster* series from **The Software Toolworks** can't get any better, a new, improved version hits the shelves. Those of you who already own the *2000* or *2100* versions won't mind shelling out the loot for the new *3000* game — the improvements are so impressive that it's a must-have program for chess enthusiasts at all levels of expertise.

Both the DOS and Windows versions of *The Chessmaster 3000* offer crisp, colorful VGA graphics. The 320x200 VGA mode with 256 colors is nice, but we preferred the definition and image clarity of the 16-color, high-res EGA/VGA mode. (There's also support for CGA and Hercules monochrome graphics.)

Beginning players will find teaching and hint modes as well as an interactive tutorial, advice on openings, move takeback options, and a host of other friendly features. Advanced players will discover a library of 150,000 opening moves, a United States Chess Federation rating feature, import and export of ASCII and Forsythe board positions, and a player-style creation feature that lets you customize computer opponents in a multitude of ways.

Among the most impressive of the new features is the Natural Language Advice and Analysis resource, which offers the player conversational English analyses of positions and hints on possible lines of play. This is a wonderful innovation in teaching chess, one of the best yet in computer chess gaming.

There are 150 sample chess games ranging from Philidor in 1790 to Christiansen in 1991. (There's also a 151st game on the disk not listed in the manual: the chess game in Kubrick's film *2001* between the HAL 9000 computer and Frank Poole. The Ruy Lopez-Morphy defense is extrapolated from later board positions shown fleetingly in the movie.)

The list of bells and whistles is extensive. Classic and other saved games can be played at any speed you wish through a set of VCR controls. All blindfold chess variations are supported. The program will create and run a round-robin tournament for any mix of human and computer players up to eight. In Championship mode, you must adhere to the strict rules of standard championship play — but win a game in championship mode, and the program will let you print out a certificate attesting to your success.

There is much, much more to *The Chessmaster 3000* than can be detailed here. With each new version, *The Chessmaster* proves once again why it's the reigning Grandmaster of PC-based chess programs.

—Selby Bateman

STANFORD WONG VIDEO POKER

Stanford Wong Video Poker has all the earmarks of a Villa Crespo casino gaming simulation. Its straightforward, jump-right-in interface is complemented by easily accessible help screens. There's a full range of video poker variations, from jacks or better to deuces and jokers wild, and each variation has three one-player games (casino mode, practice tournament, or strategy) and a two-player tournament. And like earlier Villa Crespo releases, there's a panoply of customizing options that let you fine-tune the game to your needs.

One of the most useful options is one that lets you set the "tolerance level" of the tutor. You can set it to warn you any time that you don't make the most statistically sound card selections, or you can adjust it so it won't annoy you when you knowingly buck the odds and go for a long shot with high returns.

There are a couple of minor annoyances in game play, but for the most part *Stanford Wong* shows much care to detail. The two-player tourney is hampered by the requirements that the players compete simultaneously. If the players could compete at different times (and there's no reason they couldn't) they could both use the mouse — the fastest and simplest of the interface methods — instead of the more awkward keyboard commands.

The graphics and sound are the weakest design elements in *Stanford Wong*. The 320 X 200, 16-color graphics can be most charitably described as no-frills, and the looped soundtrack of "casino noise" is *very* short (although it does contain a voice that sounds suspiciously like Jerry Lewis).

But Villa Crespo has always placed more emphasis on practicality than aesthetics, and *Stanford Wong* is probably the most versatile and functional video poker package for your PC. The only real problem here is that video poker itself is not a very interesting game to simulate.

Because there are no betting rounds as in regular poker, game play is reduced to simply knowing which cards to hold. To *Stanford Wong*'s credit, it does teach you that skill very quickly. Once you've learned what cards to hold, however, the main reason to play *Stanford Wong* is to become accustomed to staring at a video poker display for long periods of time.

—*Stephen Poole*

ADVANCED GRAVIS PC GAMEPAD

Advanced Gravis's PC GamePad is the kind of product that inspires the comment, "Why didn't anybody think of this before?!?"

For years, cartridge-based game machines have used the joypad type controller, and for good reason. Joypads are perfect for the quick, precise maneuvering required in arcade games. And because you hold them in both hands, they're more stable than most joysticks.

The PC GamePad feels very solid, and it's large enough for adult hands. The directional control is sealed and permanently calibrated, eliminating those annoying re-calibration sessions necessary with many PC joysticks. The directional pad is on the left, and four buttons are on the right. And if you'd prefer to reverse that layout, you simply flip a switch and turn the pad around, with the direction pad on the right. This nice feature lets both right- and left-handed players use the GamePad with equal comfort, a feature rare among even videogame joypads.

We tried the GamePad with a number of titles, from *Chuck Yeager's Air Combat* to *Jimmy Connors Pro Tennis*. It performed admirably in almost every test, and proved especially useful for sports and arcade titles. You still might prefer a joystick for flight sims, though.

Many of today's new PC users are videogame graduates, practically raised on the joypad. To them, a joystick can seem cumbersome and inexact. This growing segment of the market will undoubtedly embrace the PC GamePad as a godsend, but even the most devoted joystick fan should give the GamePad a look. In many arcade-action games, it provides the kind of comfortable and accurate control that just can't be achieved with a joystick.

—Matt Firme

OH NO! MORE LEMMINGS

Hooked again! Just when I thought I had kicked the habit of the original *Lemmings*, Psygnosis released the appropriately titled sequel to snare me once more — *Oh, no!*

For those unfamiliar with *Lemmings*, suffice it to say that in the land of the lemmings, you're king. Armies of the cute but thick-headed lemmings wander about in a hundred fantastic landscapes, and it's your responsibility to guide them to safety. You're constantly having to stop the poor little wretches from hurtling off high platforms, dropping into raging waters, being trapped forever in dead ends, and otherwise bumbling around their world without a care for their survival.

The secret is to bestow selected skills on individual lemmings so that they can lead the other lemmings safely out of each level. For example, you might be able to teach a lemming to climb a wall or float down via an umbrella, perhaps to block other lemmings or dig tunnels and build bridges. Guide them safely through each landscape, and you get to advance to the next puzzle.

Oh No! More Lemmings offers 100 new puzzles, with 20 puzzles per level. The first 20 are labelled Tame, and they are. By the time you've run through them you'll think you're rather smart — a real *Lemmings* master. Well, forget it. When you hit the next level, Crazy, there's a quantum leap in the degree of difficulty. Psygnosis has been getting plenty of phone calls for help even for the early stages of the Crazy level, and there are Wild, Wicked, and Havoc levels still to finish after that!

There's no question that this second round of *Lemmings* puzzles will appeal to anyone who enjoyed the first. But you can bet that unless you're a *very* good puzzle solver, the frustration factor may start to set in on some landscapes before you finish the first 30 puzzles. Thankfully, registered users can get some help directly from Psygnosis, at least until the company's hint book is completed. The new hint book will contain hints and strategies for both the first and second *Lemmings* games.

—Selby Bateman

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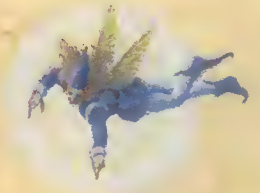

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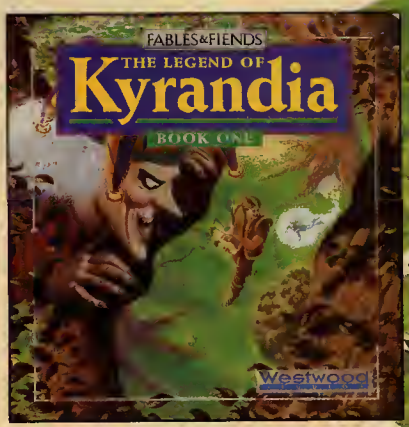

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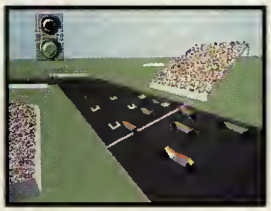
TEAM SUZUKI



"Two Wheeled Flight Sim" is the description on the back of the box of this motorcycle racing simulation from **Konami**, and it's more accurate than you might think. The polygon graphics are very similar to the kind you see in many flight simulators, and just as in those flight sims they help make the animation in *Team Suzuki* smooth and convincing.

There are plenty of options here, enough to make it simple for a beginner to hop on a bike and hit the track. Three sizes of bikes — 125cc, 250cc, and the highly powerful 500cc — are available, and you can choose to control them via a joystick, keyboard, or mouse. The 125cc shifts gears automatically, making it the perfect bike for a novice to learn the ropes on. In fact, shifting gears is probably one of the trickiest parts of the game, accurately reflecting one of the key ingredients of motorcycle racing.

At $19.95, *Team Suzuki* is an attractive package. But you should keep in mind that you won't get many of the bells and whistles found in more expensive simulations. For example, there is no true VCR function. The Instant Replay feature kicks in after every race-ending crash to show the wreck from two angles; turn on the Instant Replay *during* a race, and the event automatically ends.

The wrecks themselves aren't visually satisfying, either. We took off at full speed for a bridge abutment just so we could see a spectacular crash on Instant Replay, but there wasn't a crash *per se*. You simply accumulate damage points until you reach 100 percent, then your bike sort of disappears.

During a race you can switch between several viewing perspectives. Unfortunately, you can only drive with accuracy from the first-person perspective. Since you can't use those perspectives during the Instant Replay, they're basically useless.

Controlling the bike with a joystick was a little tricky, and we didn't even attempt using a keyboard or mouse. The Gravis PC GamePad (reviewed elsewhere in this issue) offered excellent control, however, and once we got the hang of shifting gears we had a great time zipping around the track. *Team Suzuki* may not be a state-of-the-art simulation, but it does create a genuine sense of movement and speed. There aren't many motorcycle sims on the market, and that in itself gives *Team Suzuki* added appeal.

—*Stephen Poole*

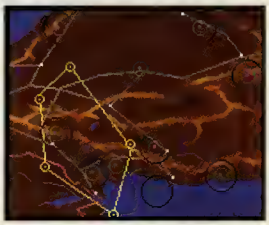
OPERATION SLEDGEHAMMER: MEGAFORTRESS MISSION DISK ONE

A growing number of computer gamers have become fans of the great, lumbering beast known as the Megafortress — the super-modified, heavily armed B-52 that was the central character of Dale Brown's novel, "Flight of the Old Dog." **Three-Sixty** turned the premise into a top-notch computer game, and recently issued the first mission disk, *Operation Sledgehammer*.

This game doesn't require Yeageresque barrel rolls and Luftwaffean loops. When you're commanding the air equivalent of a great white whale, success comes by coordinating your battle stations with an efficiency and attention to detail that lets you plow through all enemies that stand between you and the multiple targets that only *you* can take out. The Megafortress may be slow and cumbersome, but it's got the firepower of an entire squadron of fighters and bombers.

Megafortress is a fascinating exercise in resource management and knowledge of your enemy's capabilities. And *Operation Sledgehammer* extends that modus operandi into the Middle East—11 missions over a 12-day period to knock out Libya's terrorist supply system capabilities, and 14 subsequent missions in 16 days to neutralize a radical Iranian general who is threatening the existence of a moderate Iranian government.

There's a satisfying variety of assignments in these 25 missions, and the array of potential targets includes everything from heavily armed destroyers and subs to terrorist camps, oil storage facilities, and chemical weapons plants.



The new missions disk adds the ASM-119A Penguin anti-ship missile and the CBU-95 Fuel Air Explosive to your arsenal, along with the armaments already available in the original game. But you'll also be facing three new land-based surface-to-air missiles, two in Iran and one in Libya. And the skies can get crowded with new enemy jets — chiefly the incredibly fast MiG-25 Foxbat and the deadly Mirage F-1C.

As with the original game, *Operation Sledgehammer* rewards those gamers who learn how to maneuver swiftly and efficiently among five battle stations: Pilot, Copilot, Navigator, Electronic Warfare officer, and Offensive Weapons officer. Each of the stations has its own part to play in the success of every mission, so the better you know your way around the Megafortress, the greater your likelihood of a achieving mission goals.

Operation Sledgehammer fits nicely into the *Megafortress* world, and desktop pilots will have fun with these new missions.

—*Selby Bateman*

OMAR SHARIF ON BRIDGE

For years bridge players have relied on Omar Sharif for advice on their games. His syndicated column — written with Charles Goren until the master's death last year, now coauthored with Tannah Hirsch — offers clear advice for players of any level.

So when **Interplay** claims that *Omar Sharif on Bridge* offers a "personal tutor," you might assume that the information in this bridge program will be as thorough and helpful as the column. You'd unfortunately be mistaken.

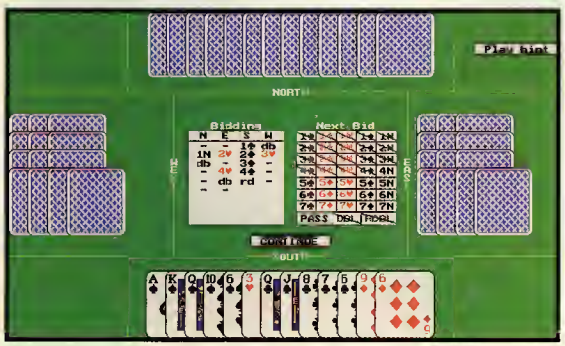
Although *Omar Sharif* is probably the best bridge program available, that's not going to stop people from feeling misled after they buy it. Title notwithstanding, this isn't a tutorial; it's a standard computerized card game. Ask for a hint, and you receive a short comment such as "I suggest that you pass." There's no added help or explanation offered. And if a computer opponent makes a surprise move, such as opening with one of your trump cards (which happens fairly often), you can't find out what its strategy might be.

The other big flaw is that *Omar Sharif* doesn't let you customize game play to suit your skill level. There's novice and regular play, but you can't learn or practice more advanced bridge techniques such as the Blackwood convention.

However, for average players who are looking for a game that gives them some basic experience, *Omar Sharif* should fit the bill. The graphics are better than in most bridge programs, and the mouse-driven interface is easy to use. The bidding process is especially nice: Every possible bid is included on a grid, and you simply point and click on the bid you wish — also to double your opponents' bids or to pass. If you make a mistake and bid seven diamonds instead of passing, for example, the computer catches your error.

Other nice features include rebid and takeback options, and there are some great hands saved to disk to give you a feeling of power. You can also load your own dream hands or switch hands with an opponent and play again. All in all, *Omar Sharif* does many things right — but it's no grand slam.

— Leslie Mizell



PREHISTORIK

This release from **Titus** has almost all the ingredients of an excellent PC arcade-action game: nice cartoony graphics, catchy soundtrack, and challenging game play. In fact, challenging is an understatement: *Prehistorik* is devilishly tough.

You control Prehistorik, a troglodyte who bears more than a passing resemblance to Ringo Starr in the movie *Caveman*. Your goal is to gather enough food to be allowed into the next level (the introduction in the manual astutely points out that in prehistoric time, "If you wanted to stay alive you had to eat.")

Gathering the bananas, cherries, hams, and other food is simply a matter of walking over them. But Prehistorik lives in a time when dangerous beasts roam the country, searching for food just like our hero, and they head for him as soon as he comes in sight. Some critters can be dispatched with a couple of whacks of your club, others may require up five blows before they'll go down, and a few are just plain invincible.

There are also plenty of obstacles to negotiate: fire, water, thornbushes, and spiked rocks, to name the most common ones. And our PC Piltdown man isn't as rugged as you might think. If he even brushes against the spiked rocks, you immediately lose a life.

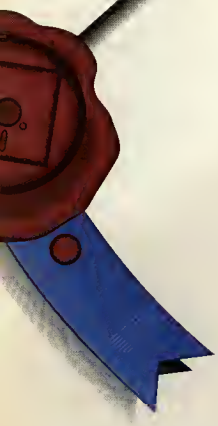
Throughout the game you'll find caves to enter in search of power-ups, special bonuses, and food (of course). All of this is pretty standard stuff; unless you're a complete novice to arcade gaming, you've been down this road before.

There's certainly nothing wrong with that. After all, not many gamers are going to pick up this package expecting a classic game of strategy. What's important for a game of this stripe is how it looks, sounds, and plays, and *Prehistorik* gets top marks in the first two categories. The only real problem lies in character control.

The reason for that is simple. Instead of using one of the joystick buttons to jump — which seems like the most logical method — you push the stick upward. It takes a lot of practice to achieve an acceptable degree of accuracy. Keyboard control is more accurate, but takes even more practice than the joystick. Then again, *Prehistorik* looks and sounds so good that you probably won't feel put out investing time to master the moves.

—Stephen Poole

AND THE WINNERS ARE...



SimAnt, *Lemmings*, and *Sid Meier's Civilization* were multiple winners in this year's annual Software Publishers Association (SPA) awards presented during the organization's spring conference in Seattle.

SPA members include most of the companies that create and market the electronic games and educational entertainment products that come to market. And since the companies themselves cast the ballots for the awards, the prestige factor within the software industry is understandably high.

Awards were presented in three major categories: business, entertainment, and education. Below is an annotated list of this year's entertainment winners, including several of the award winners from the education category that fall into the area of educational entertainment. You'll notice several titles that also received *Game Players* awards (listed in our last issue).

BEST ACTION/ARCADE PROGRAM

Lemmings

(Psygnosis)

One of the most innovative and charming games ever released for the PC, *Lemmings* seems to be a favorite of everyone.

BEST ENTERTAINMENT PROGRAM (tie)

Sid Meier's Civilization

(MicroProse)

Lemmings

(Psygnosis)

Sid Meier's slate of superior simulations is becoming legendary, and this epic adds to his well-deserved success.

BEST FANTASY ROLE PLAYING/ADVENTURE PROGRAM

Martian Memorandum

(Access Software)

Beautiful digitized graphics, voice synthesis, and an absorbing storyline combined to make this graphic adventure a winner for Access.

BEST SIMULATION PROGRAM

SimAnt: The Electronic Ant Colony

(Maxis)

The same folks that brought us *SimCity* and *SimEarth* have another hit on hand with this program that's part learning tool and part free-form exploratorium.

BEST SPORTS PROGRAM

Links Championship Courses

(Access)

Last year, SPA members voted the golf simulation, *Links*, as Best Sports Program, and the string of finely detailed, high-quality add-on course disks that followed it up made the simulation even better.

BEST STRATEGY PROGRAM

Sid Meier's Civilization

(MicroProse)

BEST EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Kid Pix

(Broderbund)

This delightful paint program for kids is an art-creation playground complete with sound effects, speech synthesis, and a host of special features.

BEST ELEMENTARY EDUCATION PROGRAM

Reader Rabbit 2

(The Learning Company)

This sequel takes an award-winning learning classic, improves it dramatically, and moves it into the PC technology of the '90s. A delightful charmer for ages 5-8.

BEST HOME LEARNING PROGRAM

Where in America's Past Is Carmen Sandiego?

(Broderbund)

This is the latest and best program in the very successful learning/adventure series featuring Carmen and her band of thieves.

BEST EDUCATION TOOL PROGRAM

SimAnt: The Electronic Ant Colony

(Maxis)

CRITICS' CHOICE AWARD WINNER: FOR BEST CONSUMER PROGRAM

(selected by members of the press)

Tie:

Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe

(Lucasfilm Games)

Sid Meier's Civilization

(MicroProse)

Secret Weapons is a remarkable aerial-combat simulation that pits U.S. war planes against a "what-if" array of Luftwaffe jet and rocket fighters toward the close of World War II.

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HARDBALL

ACCOLADE ADDS AL MICHAELS' PLAY-BY-PLAY, NEW LOOK, NEW FEATURES

LANCE ELKO

The boys of summer are back—and so is a PC baseball classic. *Al Michaels Announces Hardball III*, the latest release in Accolade's highly popular Hardball series, is a top-flight baseball simulation that takes advantage of today's PC power.

As you can tell from the title, the game's most unique feature is the digitized voice of Al Michaels doing the play-by-play commentary. While this certainly brings a great deal of value to the product, it's really more of an added bonus to a well-designed and very playable baseball simulation. Take away Michaels' voice, and you still have one of the best—arguably *the best* — baseball sim on the market.

The *Hardball* series has a star-studded past. The original game debuted in 1985, selling more than half-a-million copies across all computer formats, and *Hardball II* won the Software Publishers Association's Best

When you're at the plate, the catcher's view gives you a good look at the incoming pitch. You also see any runners on base.

III: NEW MVP?

Sports Program award in 1989.

Fans of the earlier versions will recognize some of the same features in *III*, but these have been enhanced, and a variety of new features and options has been added. Graphically, the most obvious improvement is the detail afforded by the game's 256-color VGA display. The viewing selection, one of *II*'s features, lets you watch the action from behind the mound when you're pitching or through the catcher's eyes when you're at the plate. For close infield plays, you can select zoom mode to automatically show a closeup view whenever there's a tight call at a base. Also, the designers have handled viewing perspectives quite nicely. From any of the viewing options, the relative proportions of field and players are a reasonable approximation of what you see on TV.

As in other recent baseball simulations — *Weaver II*, *Tony LaRussa*, *Bo Jackson*, and MicroLeague's newest titles — you can elect to manage, create leagues, edit players and their stats, or just play an arcade-style game in which you manually control pitches, swings, throws, and catches. Instant replay and a highlights-reel feature are also available. One other notable feature is data file compatibility with other baseball sims — owners of *Weaver II*, *LaRussa*, or *Hardball II* can import their favorite team to *III*.

The center field camera affords the best view when you're pitchin. Note the faithful rendering of Wrigley Field.

The interface in *III* is intuitive, helping to make the game extremely playable. It's managed mostly by point-and-click menus and windows, letting you move around easily to make player substitutions, position fielders, select pitches, and so on. You can step up the sequences in game play by pressing the fire button or Enter key to get to the next pitch, or quickly get to the next half of an inning once a third out is made.

Especially easy to use are the Pitching Options and Hitting Options windows. When pitching, you click on one of your hurler's four available pitches (such as fastball, screwball, slider). If you choose to control pitch location, you can throw high, low, inside, or outside by making the appropriate movement with the joystick or pressing the corresponding key. Pitching Options also lets you watch a replay, issue an intentional walk, shift your outfielders, or move your infielders around (double-play depth, guard the lines, hold the runner, move them in, or customize the position of each fielder).

A baseball card with photo and stats appears whenever a hitter steps up to the plate.

When you're up to bat, you can direct your hitter to swing for power, make contact, hit and run, bunt, etc. After just a couple innings of practice, controlling your pitcher, fielders, or batter is a quick and automatic process.

Hardball III stands up well as a PC arcade game. As is the case with any baseball sim, though, there's a bit of a learning curve at first. Pitching and hitting both come quickly — but fielding is considerably more difficult. When a ball is hit, the camera angle changes and the fielder closest to the ball is spotlighted. Judging a batted ball's speed, trajectory, and distance — particularly on hits to the outfield — takes a little getting used to. But moving your fielder left, right, in, or out to meet the ball is the real challenge. Plan on playing a few exhibition games to get comfortable with your fielders.

If you favor statistical play, you can set up a league, modeling teams and players after their real-life counterparts if you like, and selecting cap and jersey colors to conform to those of real major league teams. In League Play you move through an entire season playing a week-by-week schedule, then playing the two league championship series, and finally the World Series.

On a close play at a base, such as this pick-off attempt, a detailed window pops onto the screen.

Hardball III *spotlights the fielder closest to the location of the ball's destination. If you select automatic fielding, the player will make the correct play on the ball.*

You can view a league or team schedule month-by-month for the entire season. Blue squares indicate home games, and red squares show when the team is on the road.

play out one or more games from each weekly schedule. Select a simulated game, and a box score is shown (runs for each inning are filled in a matter of seconds), a final score is displayed, and then league standings are updated. You can play a dozen or so games from each week's schedule in a matter of minutes.

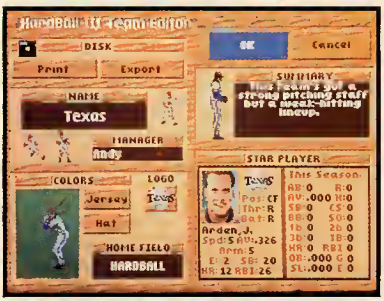
The game design in *Hardball III* appeals to a broad range of playing styles. From the main menu, you can select Options to set a variety of effects. For example, you can toggle on or off pitcher fatigue, fielding errors, automatic fielding (turn it on and fielders make the correct play on the ball), base stealing, DHs, and player stats (in which players either perform according to statistical averages or all players are of equal ability), and pitching zone (every pitch is thrown either in the strike zone or to any area you choose around or across the plate).

Use the Player Editor to change the photo, name, uniform number, position, attributes, and statistics.

If you wish to personally manage, say, just one or two teams, but wish to play out an entire season, you can statistically set up each team the way you like and have the computer

Realists will appreciate several nice touches in the game. For example, forget to warm up your bullpen before making a pitching change, and your cold reliever may be ineffective or lack control. On the statistical side, an "import/export player" feature is included to accommodate early- or mid-season trades for those players who model their league on major league rosters.

Hardball III encompasses nearly every facet of the game. We haven't covered a number



The Team Editor lets you change the manager's name, jersey colors, cap colors, logo, home stadium, and star player.

of minor features — squeeze plays, pitchouts, pickoffs, editing team logos, stadium choices, changing players' pictures or uniform numbers, etc. — but suffice it to say that almost everything a baseball sim buff could want is here. Perhaps the only thing missing is

When you want to insert a substitute fielder, pinch hitter, or reliever, scan your bench or bullpen for the best choice.

a stat downloading capability or supplemental team disks — those who want real players with real stats must commit a lot of typing time up front to set up a league.

To run *Hardball III*, you'll need at least a 10-MHz 286 machine, SVGA, VGA/MCGA, or EGA graphics, and a hard drive (*Hardball III* requires 2 megabytes of storage space). To hear Al Michaels' play-by-play, you'll need 2 megabytes of RAM and either an EMS or XMS memory manager (386 MAX, QEMM, or EMM 386), or DOS HIMEM.SYS. Most popular sound cards are supported, although you can listen to Michaels through your PC speaker provided you have the DOS HIMEM.SYS driver.

OVER TO YOU, AL

here's no question that Al Michaels' play by play adds a dimension of realism to *Hardball III*. His calls are context sensitive and, yes, the voice sounds exactly like Al Michaels. You hear his familiar intonation, including the expressive nuances. The broadcast, of course, is of the generic stripe. You get straight play-by-play — updates on the batter's count, up-to-the-minute inning and score, the current hitter's batting average, and so on. After the first few innings, Michaels gives each hitter's game stats as he steps into the batter's box — for example, "the catcher is 2 for 3 with one home run." Other typical phrases include "After seven innings, the home team is in front, 5 to 2," and "a line drive — speared by the second baseman!"

It's safe to assume that while some gamers won't play

Hardball III without Michaels' chatter, others will turn it off. It's a matter of preference. Regardless, the digitized play-by-play of a major sports personality is a first in PC gaming, and it's done very well.

While *Hardball III* is the first sports sim to use Michaels' voice, it won't be the last. Accolade signed Michaels to an exclusive multi-year agreement to provide play-by-play commentary in future sports titles.

Michaels has been broadcasting for ABC Sports since 1977. He's covered six World Series, five All-Star games, seven League Championship series, as well as NCAA football and college basketball. He joined ABC's Monday Night Football crew in 1986.

Prior to joining ABC, Michaels was sportscaster for the San Francisco Giants, Cincinnati Reds, and the University of Hawaii football and basketball teams.

GP

WAR TORN

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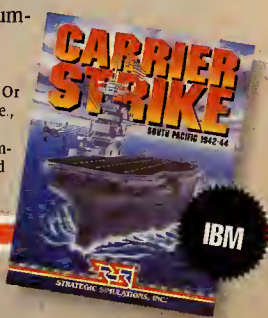

IBM

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One of the first PC pigskin simulations arriving in 1992 will be *NFL*, from **Konami**. *NFL* is sanctioned by the National Football League, but even if it weren't it should make it to the top of every PC football fan's list.

NFL includes most every feature a football fan could want in a PC game. Its excellent statistical base requires strategic thinking; its arcade qualities make it a hoot to play; and its detail — from penalties and injuries to variable weather, post-season play, and off-season player drafts — creates a remarkable sense of realism.

The simulation's push-button interface, accessed by keyboard or joystick, makes system configuration and selection a snap. Sound effects from a compatible sound card include clear digitized referee calls, grunting lineman, moaning quarterbacks, and frenzied fans. Replay options let you view from normal or reverse angles, in fast forward or slo-mo, or analyze a play frame by frame.

Team selection and editing are a simple matter of highlighting a team name, bringing up the roster, and editing player attributes. (Konami loosely modeled its teams from the 1990-1991 season.) Because *NFL* is not endorsed by the NFL Player's Association, real player names aren't used, but you can edit all names and attributes. Each player has a total point pool you can split among ten attributes, such as speed, agility, intelligence, blocking, etc. Also, you can edit personal information such as weight, height, age, and experience.

PETER SCISCO

Once you've selected a team, you can play scrimmage games at training camp. This gives you a chance to learn your playbook, to get the feel of controlling players, and to design new plays. *NFL*'s point-and-click play designer makes it easy for novices to design plays, although it sacrifices the free-form play design of the chalkboard approach used in other PC football games. For those who want to design plays but don't have much experience assigning blocking patterns and pass routes, *NFL*'s approach is an excellent compromise.

Avoid the pass rush or eat Astroturf.

NFL lets the computer handle some of the game's more tedious chores, freeing the player to concentrate on winning the game instead of wrestling with complex decisions and unwieldy interfaces. For example, you can select Fatigue and Injuries options, but have the computer make automatic substitutions if a player has to come out.

In deciding whether to coach or play, you actually have three ways of playing the game, each suited to different experience and ability levels. With Coach Only, you select plays and let the computer handle the execution. This is a good starting point for first-time players, and it provides good training in play selection.

Divide each player's skill points between ten attributes.

Select Choose Player for a second level of play. Here, you control a single player for each down—if you choose a receiver, you must run the pattern. (Primary pass routes are indicated on the play selection screen.) If you can't get open, the computer-controlled quarterback will select a secondary receiver.

Pick a team in a colder climate, and you might find youself playing in a snow storm.

For the ultimate challenge, leave both Coach Only and Choose Player turned off to control the quarterback at the snap, execute the pass or handoff, then control the receiver or running back when the ball changes hands. This mode is the most difficult to master and requires practice at training camp.

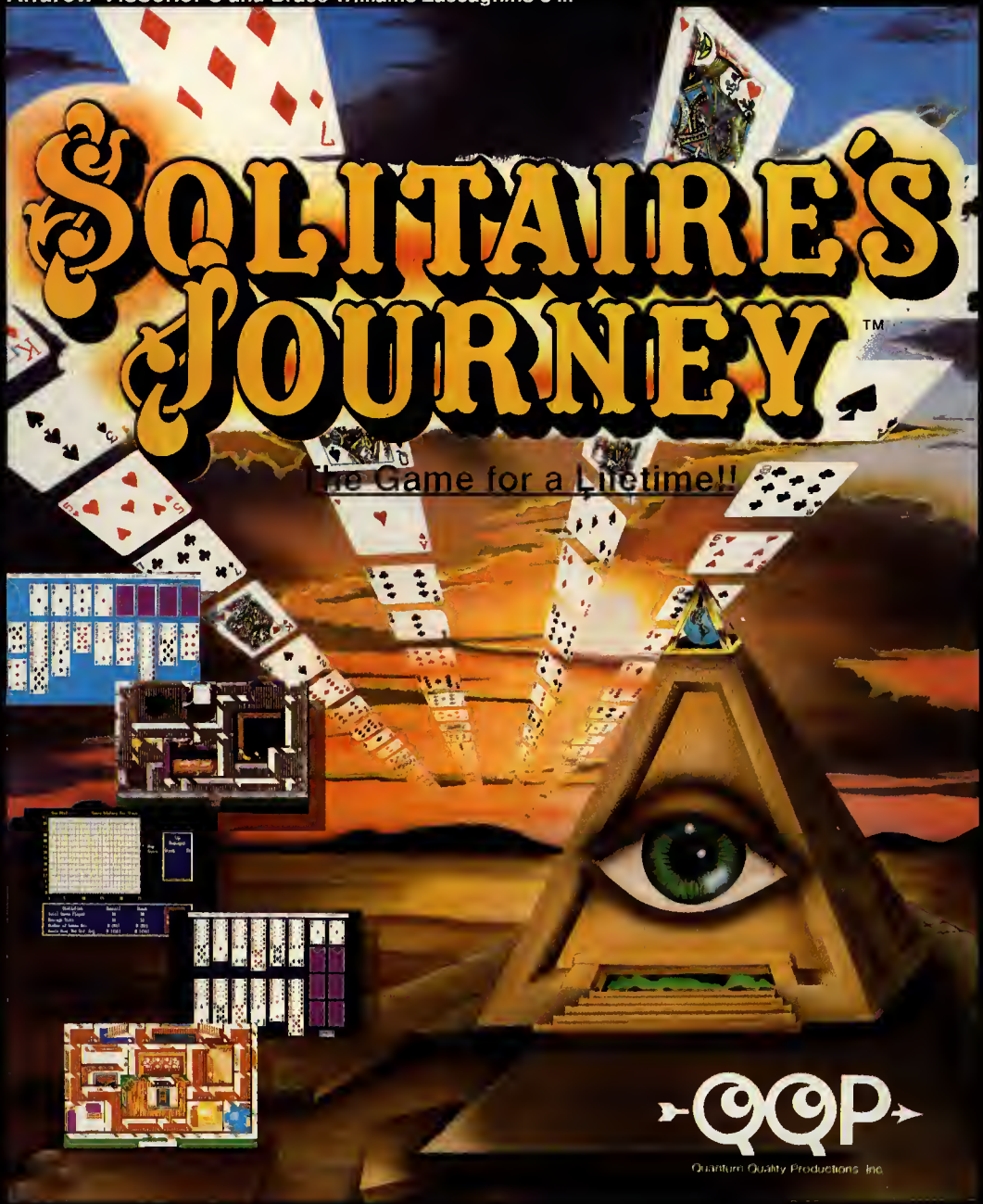
To execute a pass play, you must drop back after the snap, select Passing Mode, then cycle through eligible receivers. You also have to avoid the pass rush before releasing the ball.

League play is highlighted by a post-season playoff complete with first-round byes and wildcards. After the Super Bowl, it's back to the general manager's office for the draft and for player trades. *NFL* makes this element of football — trades and drafts — easy to manage and an interesting addition to the game.

Konami is now putting the finishing details on *NFL* and making changes to the program's logic to improve what's already an excellent product. By the looks of it, PC football game fans are going to have a darned good reason for staying inside this winter.

GP

Andrew Visscher's and Bruce Williams Zaccagnino's ...



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Wizardry CRUSADERS of the DARK SAVANT

NEIL RANDALL

For the true fantasy role-playing aficionado, the appearance of a new Wizardry adventure is nothing short of an event. After all, the original Wizardry game was the one that started the computer role-playing craze, and the first three Wizardry scenarios (which originally appeared on the Apple II) remain some of the hobby's most fondly remembered games.

The Wizardry games eventually fell behind other fantasy role-playing series such as Ultima, The Bard's Tale, and AD&D, but last year's *Bane of the Cosmic Forge* (*Wizardry VI*), with its revamped gaming system, was proof that **Sir-Tech** was willing to modernize an old classic. Now on the horizon is *Wizardry VII: Crusaders of the Dark Savant*, and with it even more changes. No longer content to play catch-up to those other series, *Wizardry VII* sets some important standards of its own.

One noticeable change is in the way *Crusaders* embraces mouse-users. Except when you type in responses to questions from characters you meet in the adventure, you can perform all functions in the game with mouse clicks. Another enhancement is sure to bring joy to those players who hate drawing maps: characters with mapping skills can keep an ongoing map of the party's whereabouts.

Earlier Wizardry adventures were plagued by the inability to save more than one game at a time. Now you can save as many as you want, by simply renaming the game when you use the Save command. It's also fairly easy to restart a game at any point, a crucial feature for any long role-playing game. The Spellcasting system has been enhanced as well, with more spells available in more categories, and the combat system has improved while retaining the attractiveness of the original. Wizardry combat remains "phased" (i.e., you can assign combat duties to members of your party without real-time constraints), and this is perfectly in tune with the rest of the game: *Crusaders of the Dark Savant* requires thought and planning, not quick reflexes and instant responses.

Characters are rated according to eight primary statistics, ranging from Strength and Speed to Piety and even Karma (basically a luck factor). Secondary statistics include hit points, stamina, a monster kill count, carrying capacity, and the character's armor class. Characters can be asleep, frightened, blinded, poisoned, diseased, nauseated, stoned (not what you might think), irritated, and otherwise afflicted. Lizardmen, Dracons, Felpurrs, Rawulfs, and Mooks return to the Wizardry world as fighters, mages, bards, alchemists, psionics, valkyries, lords, ninjas, and more. The variety is huge, and with only six characters in a

party it's impossible to make use of every combination in any given game.

Which brings us to another attractive quality of *Crusaders of the Dark Savant*: its replayability. The most exciting feature of the game is the richness of interaction with non-player characters (NPCs). Some NPCs simply attack you, but others will negotiate with you. Depending on the Diplomacy skill of your leader, you can begin the process of convincing them to join you or give you important information. This process often takes several meetings, and when your characters are inexperienced, the most frequent result is that you simply anger the NPCs into attacking. Just as interestingly, your reputation precedes you as you move around *Dark Savant*; how you deal with NPCs can influence the way other NPCs treat you. And you're not the only party in town. Other companies (of NPCs) are adventuring as well, and they'll help you, hurt you, and sometimes rob you blind.

Dark Savant has four distinct beginnings. The first assumes you never played (or didn't complete) *Bane of the Cosmic Forge*, while the rest open from three possible *Cosmic Forge* endings. The difference in game play isn't substantial from one beginning to another, but *Savant*'s introduction differs according to what you last did in the series. It's a nice touch, demonstrating that *Savant*, like *Bane*, is likely to be replayable toward different endings.

The accompanying screens show what *Dark Savant* looks like in play. Placing the first-person window in the middle of the screen makes it evident that this is what the entire party is seeing, and the arrow keys at the bottom are arranged to offer a three-dimensional effect. Click on an arrow to move or turn (thus changing the view in the center window), on the book icon to cast spells, on the key icon to open locked doors or chests, on the campfire icon to rest, or on the hand icon to use an item. Click on a character's name to change the order of the party, or on the character's face to display the stats screen.

On the stats screen you can equip your characters as you wish — just click on an item and drag it to the character's "body" at the right side. Make sure, though, that you do this after creating new characters, or they'll begin the game fighting with their bare hands.

As you move through the world of Lost Guardia (the setting for *Dark Savant*), each of your characters automatically increases in levels as soon as he or she gains the necessary experience. When that happens you're shown which statistics increase, and you can select the weapons, physical, and academic skills that increase at the same time. Magic-users can learn new spells as they increase in level, and you can select these as well. As in most of this game, you are under few constraints.

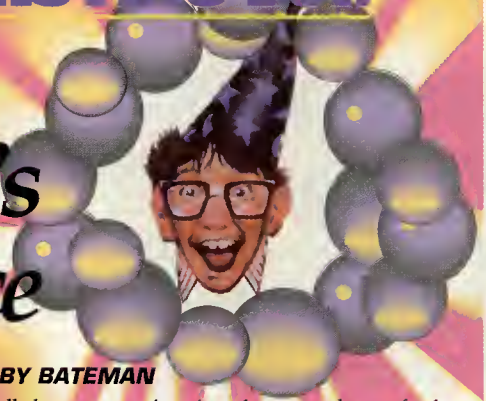
Crusaders of the Dark Savant unquestionably moves the Wizardry series out of dungeon-oriented monotony and into something very much different. With its NPC interactions and its portrayal of a world in which things happen apart from character actions, *Dark Savant* ushers in a new and very welcome era in computer role-playing. In a genre that has just begun to fulfill its potential, this is excellent news indeed.

GP

HELLLPP!—FUL HINTS

SPELLCASTING 201:

The Sorcerer's Appliance



SELBY BATEMAN

Spellcasting 201 *is a masterful blend of humorous text adventure and attractive supporting graphic screens and maps.*

Back in the early- to mid-80s, a company called Infocom became the class act of the all-text computer adventure genre, creating some of the most literate and engaging games available. Roaming the halls of Infocom was a young Steve Meretzky, a recent MIT graduate with a wacky sense of humor, who cut his teeth creating a handful of the most distinctive of these titles.

The humor in Meretzky's work was irreverent and playful, the puzzles ranging from the punningly obvious to the cunningly subtle.

Not surprisingly in this video age, the all-text computer adventure has vanished. But fortunately, **Legend Entertainment** is now producing the best descendants of those Infocom games — craftily plotted adventures that are as much fun as they are challenging — and with great graphics, too.

Legend's *Spellcasting 201*, Meretzky's latest opus, picks up where his first *Spellcasting* adventure, *Sorcerers Get All The Girls*, left off. Eager sorcerer-to-be Ernie Eaglebeak is in his sophomore year at Sorcerer U., and has pledged the Hu Delta Phart fraternity. Besides being at the mercy of the fraternity's despicable pledgemaster Chris Cowpatty, he's having to handle a major assignment from the new University president: Learn to use The Sorcerer's Appliance, the University's most valued and obscure museum piece. And, as you can imagine, there are plenty of other problems facing poor Ernie as well.

Spellcasting 201 offers some fascinating — and frustrating — puzzles, especially for beginning sorcery students. In fact, with as many puzzles as there are in this game, even experienced gamers are almost certain to run up against a few that just won't give.

It's extremely important that you examine everything you stumble upon. And — remembering Meretzky's reputation — take actions that might seem otherwise...uh...weird. After all, magic is a major part of this game, and you need to learn when and where to cast spells in order to get anywhere at all. So, as the game manual suggests, try everything.

Listed below are a few hints that we wish we'd had when we first launched into the game, plus a few more that the Legend folks say are among the most-asked questions:

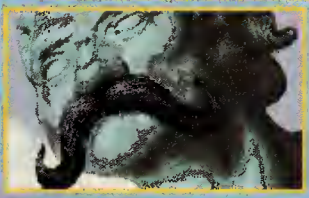
1. How do you get the coconut oil off of the statue of Marvin Meltingwolf so that you can climb up and place a moustache?

You've got to get that WOOSH spell. And that means creating a diamond with the Sorcerer's Appliance so that you can cut the glass in the Student Union's Janitor's Closet to get the spell box.

2. Which power level do you activate each time you visit the Sorcerer's Appliance?

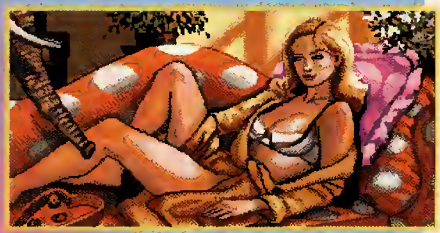
The map feature helps you learn your way around.

Connecting attachments to the Sorcerer's Appliance is an absolute must.



Meltingwolf's statue is no easy climb. WOOSH the oil away.

Those crazy cutups at Hu Delta Phart will make your life hell.



Hillary Tickingclock has an item or two that can help you get through the game.

When you find one of the Appliance's attachments, try connecting it to the Appliance to activate another power level. Set the power dial according to which power levels are lit. And another thing — you don't need to find all six Even Greater Attachments before you can create Eve.

3. How do you get Babar the elevephant out of the fraternity basement?
You have to go through the sewer system. And that means shrinking Babar with the SRINKO spell. Don't try to exit any other way. You'll also need a couple of whiffs of pollen from the simpleberry bush for added stealth so the guard won't see you.

4. How do you see your way around in the sewer system?
Maybe you didn't try enough of that delicious veal casserole in the cafeteria. If you keep trying it, you'll discover the larva (ugghh!) inside. Cast the PISEKS spell on the larva when you need light and, guess what? — firefly!

5. What can I use to cover Eve's nudity so that she can follow me around?
When you first visit Hillary Tickingclock's room, make sure you get the frock from her dresser. Give that to Eve later.

6. How do I get everyone to jump into the pool at the Tappa Kegga Bru party?
Use the Moodhorn to play "Summer Heat."

There are also a variety of actions you can take that will sometimes have surprising results. Try a few of these for additional yucks and (sometimes) enlightenment:

- Moon yourself. Moon others.
- Ask the Malls 'n Muggers crew about the game they're playing.
- Jump off of the Meltingwolf statue.
- Examine Phartie, the rubber chicken.
- Try playing in NICE mode all the way through; try the same in NAUGHTY mode.
- Try casting spells on other characters and objects.
- Go to Sorcerer Stadium at various times during the game.
- Cast SRINKO on yourself.

Plan to spend considerable time sloshing around the sewer system.

When you do find yourself hitting dead ends (and you will), Legend has a customer-support number during business hours, access numbers for the major online services, and a 24-hour recorded hint line (per-minute charges).

But if you're getting stumped on a regular basis, perhaps the best approach is Legend's "Official Hint Book," which is available at retail software stores or by calling Legend (with a major credit card) toll-free at 1-800-658-8891. There are hundreds of additional hints that make the game easier and let you in on even more of the hidden humor. This is a sprawling adventure, and there's a lot more there than most players will find on their own.

Spellcasting 201 is certainly a worthy successor to the original game. The puzzles are challenging, the time constraints a bit more rigorous, and the humor delightful. Good luck!

GP

LESLIE MIZELL

SIERRA'S

ROBIN HOOD:

A LOOK INSIDE THE LEGEND

Christy Marx handed you armor and a lance in *Conquests of Camelot: The Search for the Holy Grail*, and now she provides you with leggings and a bow for a romp through Sherwood Forest. You won't have as much fun playing Robin Hood as you did as King Arthur, but Marx's *Conquests of the Longbow: The Legend of Robin Hood*, from Sierra, still ranks above average as a graphic adventure, primarily because of her meticulous research and attention to period detail.

The Robin Hood legends are so varied that it would be virtually impossible to fit them all into one game. Marx was selective: for example, she didn't include Robin recruiting his band of Merry Men, or try to explain the circumstances that forced Robin into Sherwood. Instead, she picks up the story after Richard the Lionhearted is kidnapped while on the Third Crusade. Since Richard's brother, John, wants control of the throne, he has no intention of paying Richard's ransom. It falls to Robin and others faithful to Richard — such as Maid Marian — to save the king.

In *Longbow*, you divide your time collecting money for the ransom, helping innocent citizens harassed by John and the Sheriff of Nottingham, and wooing a receptive Marian. There's a certain system to it all. Each day, regardless of any

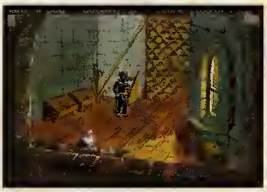
As the game begins, Richard the Lionhearted is captured while on the Third Crusade. Richard's brother, John, isn't about to raise money for Richard's return — he wants the throne for himself.

What are you waiting for? If you don't rescue Marian from this lethal situation, you won't progress very far. Although it's possible to finish the game even if Marian dies, you can't finish if she dies this early in the adventure.

Any task Marian gives you should become top priority. Therefore, before you rescue the widow's three sons, search for Marian's scroll. And if you play your cards right the next time you meet Marian, she might give you more than you bargained for.

Search the monk's garments for two objects you need to get into the monastery. Blow the flute to get a brother to row you across the fens, then solve the riddles of the gemstones to gain entrance to the building itself.

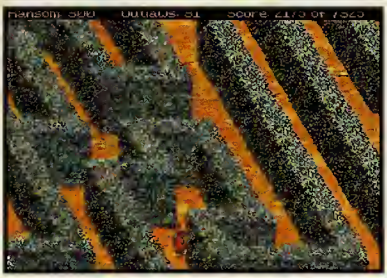
Fulk won't talk to you until you recover his scroll. Don't turn down the jester — he's not only the king's loyal servant, but he's also your ticket out of the monastery.



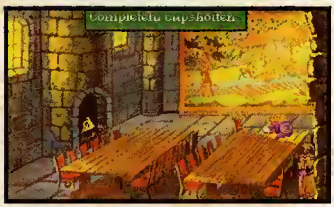
You must divert the prior's attention before you're able to steal Fulk's scroll. What could be more distracting than a lap full of hot coffee?

Confused by this lineup of gargoyles? You obviously didn't read the scrolls carefully. Be sure to check out the scroll that talks about the history of the monastery.

Once you've escaped from the monastery, set your rescue mission in motion. When you bring the abbot's cask to the pub, play a game of Nine Men's Morris to win an amethyst. Your best tactic is to maneuver three pieces so you can go in and out of a "mill" (notice the three black markers left of center).



Find the secret door hidden within the maze behind St. Mary's. Later in the game, you must navigate the maze without a second to spare, so be sure to remember the quickest path.



Return the filled cask to St. Mary's, then join the abbot for a few quick drinks. If you've got the amethyst, you should have no trouble drinking him under the table.

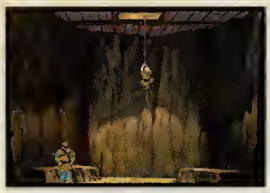
With the abbot out of the way, you can search his room for the puzzle box. Once you've found it, beat a hasty retreat — you can figure out its secrets later when you have more time.

crisis that has occurred, you should head from your camp to the nearby Overlook to see who's entering Nottingham. Question the travelers, get their clothes (by hook or crook), and use the disguises to infiltrate John's strongholds — the fens monastery, St. Mary's priory, and Nottingham castle.

Of course, there are smaller quests and missions to fulfill, as well as enemies to kill and archery matches to win. The number of points you earn for each endeavor depends on how you handle the situation. If you kill anyone unnecessarily, you receive few points (and risk losing the respect of your allies). If you use your bow or quarterstaff on a low arcade setting, you earn fewer points than on a higher level. It's also possible to finish the game even if you let Marian or a large number of your Merry Men die in the process — but if you do, don't expect a whopping score.

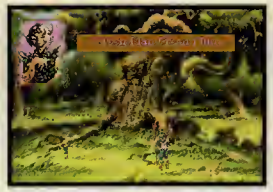
In addition to the regular adventure and action sequences, there are puzzles to solve using medieval lore. In *Conquests of Camelot*, you needed to know the language of flowers and match goddesses with their symbols; in *Longbow*, you must identify gemstones by their powers, play an ancient board game called Nine Men's Morris, and know the Druid names of the trees in Sherwood Forest. You must learn a secret hand code, and *Longbow*, like *Camelot*, offers a series of tough riddles to solve.

Despite the research that went into *Conquests of the*



If you leave some money in the cell for the guards to discover, you'll be able to help the boys escape from the pit with the disguises you "borrowed" from St. Mary's.

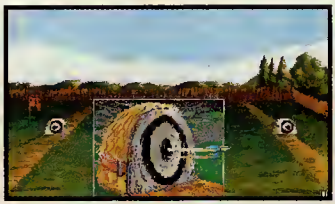
People without fast computers face a real slowdown in this scene, but the action slows down even more if you don't give the drunken sheriff the blessing for which he's asking.



Once you're safely back in Sherwood, it's time to learn more about the ways of the forest. Capture the pixie, and he'll help you meet the Green Man of the forest.

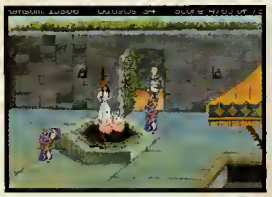
Unless you plan to spend the rest of your life counting the rings of your trunk, you'd better solve the Green Man's riddles. If you get stuck, just give any reply — you're allowed two wrong guesses, and you get a new riddle after answering incorrectly.

The people at the fair give you viewpoints on everything from politics to computer gaming. You can also pick up a few extra points while you're there. By the way, who's that lovely maiden near the top center of the screen?



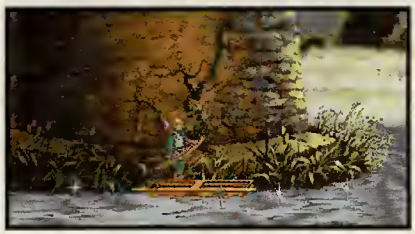
There are three rounds to the tournament, and if you win all three, you receive a golden arrow as a prize. It's your first step toward raising Richard's ransom.

Be careful when you're selling jewels. You want the sheriff to follow you into the woods, but you don't want to give away anything you may need later. If things aren't going your way, just threaten to pack up the gems — the sheriff's wife will set him straight.

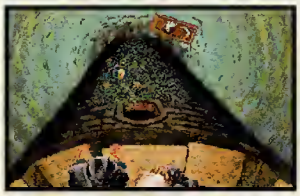


This is only the first step in saving Marian from the sheriff. With the fire ring, you can snatch her from the flames in the witch's court, but she may still die unless you provide some prompt healing.

Marian has told you the password you can use to identify yourself to the queen's knight. Before you hand over any state secrets, you'd better make sure this knight is who he says he is.



The will-o-wisps help you cross the fens, but you must find your own way up the tower. It's not difficult if you've kept your hand in practicing the ways of Druid magic.



Don't expect more action after you've finished the tough dodge-the-boulders-dropped-on-your-head sequence. From here on, the computer takes over the story.

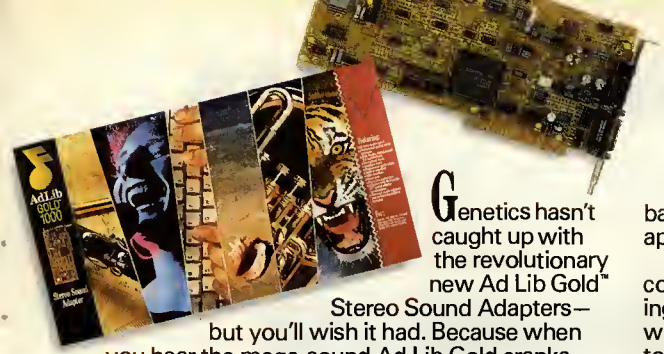
Your performance in the game is critiqued during Robin's trial. Those you've helped testify in your favor, but anyone you've treated badly is there to speak as well. If you've done very poorly, in fact, you won't even get a trial — you go straight to the gallows.

Longbow, it's just not as much fun to play as *Conquests of Camelot*. Part of the reason is Sierra's interface system, new since the earlier game, designed to minimize textual input and responses and make it easier to distribute the games in non-English-speaking markets. What the interface actually does, however, is take more of the action out of the player's hands — you end up *watching* so much of *Longbow* take place that you'll wonder who's really in charge.

That doesn't mean that *Longbow* isn't enjoyable. Parts of it are a lot of fun — especially a town fair where you can talk to people and get the medieval view on everyone from George Bush to Kevin Costner (that *other* Robin Hood). Fine graphics and authentic music add to the overall period atmosphere. But fans of *Camelot* may be disappointed in this less-challenging adventure.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K memory; VGA graphics (EGA/Tandy also available); hard drive required; 286 or faster recommended; supports major sound boards; mouse highly recommended.



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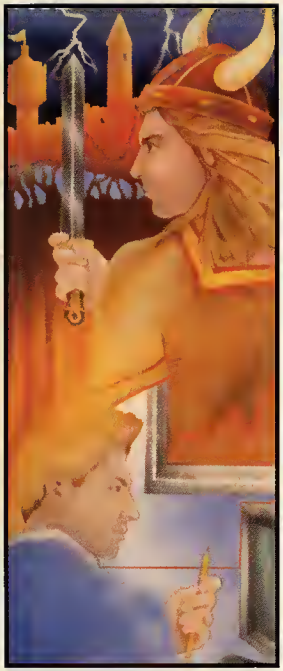


ALTERNATE LIVES

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER II: *ALL DRESSED UP, BUT....*

NEIL RANDALL

Just inside the tower of Darkmoon, our party encounters two rather zealous clerics. They seem nice, but before too long you'll have to do them in.

Last year's *Eye of the Beholder* was such a huge hit in the fantasy role-playing market that it was safe to assume it would only be a matter of time before a sequel appeared. That "matter of time" proved not long at all, and fans of the original can now hunker down and work their way around another set of temples, towers, and catacombs.

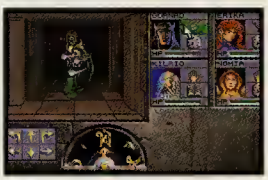
SSI has developed a reputation for nurturing the gaming systems of all its FRP series to full maturity. The original AD&D series, begun with *Pool of Radiance* and expanding into several different game worlds, has reached the point where the designers have little left to fine-tune. The game system in *Eye of the Beholder* (taken from the old *Dungeon Master* game, which never reached the PC despite great success on the Amiga and Atari ST) has been refined in *Eye II* for increased playability. Thanks to the new, smoother interface of *Eye II*, fans of *Eye I* will be able to effortlessly jump right into the thick of things.

Once you've begun play you'll see that, aside from the interface, not a lot has changed. Like *Dungeon Master* and *Eye I*, *The Legend of Darkmoon* is primarily about exploring mysterious rooms in underground corridors (or corridors far above ground, for that matter), locating items, and fighting off monsters. There's some resurrecting to do, and some good-guy characters to add to the party, but mostly you move from room to room, search for secret passageways, and pick up booty from the creatures you defeat. The game is big, the graphics are sharp, the sound enhances game play — all in all it's extremely well done. It's also nearly devoid of imagination, a problem afflicting most games in the fantasy role-playing genre by now.

The game can be played almost exclusively with the mouse. To attack, click with the right button on the character's weapon. To cast a spell, right-click on the mage's spell-book or the cleric's holy item, then left-click on the desired spell. To unlock a door, click on the character's picture, then on a key (which you've probably placed in the character's backpack); the key becomes the cursor, which you then maneuver to the lock before clicking a final time.

You can use your characters from *Eye I*, or create new ones. New characters begin at level 6 or so, and will rise no higher than about level 10 during the course of the game. One particularly strong point is that raising a character's level demands no special action on your part. You don't have to train them, and advances in levels don't cost you any money. In fact, there's no monetary system at all, an aspect more FRP's should adopt. Money systems tend to be cumbersome, and, for the most part, unwelcome.

But one of this game's seeming strengths is also a major weakness. You have full control over all the characters in the party, even the non-player characters who join as the quest progresses. The problem is that this means they always fight separately. Because combat in *Eye II* is based on real time, getting all of them coordinated in an attack means some furious (and sometimes frantic) moving and clicking of the mouse. I would much rather have the option to give computer control to whichever characters I wanted, letting the order of attack be determined by their speed rather than mine. That's what happens in SSI's other AD&D titles (i.e., *Death Knights of Krynn*), and it works very well there. Here, each character attacks separately, even though the bad guys can combine attacks against you.



Up the steps and straight into the spells of a nasty priest. On this level, there are lots of these guys.

The only other flaw — and it's a major one — is that game play becomes tedious after a while. At some points combat is extremely difficult, and resting to heal wounds and regain stamina only results in more enemies appearing. There doesn't seem to be a set number of bad guys to do away with, and that means a great deal of repeated action — too much, in fact, for the game to be fully enjoyable.

Hopefully, these problems will be addressed in Eye *III*. Let's also hope that *Eye III* will offer a far more substantial plot, with more meaningful and interesting interactions. *Eye II* is good — very good, in fact — but its excellent production qualities don't change the fact that it's firmly grounded in the hack'n'slash school of FRPs. And for many FRP fans, those are getting a little stale.

GP

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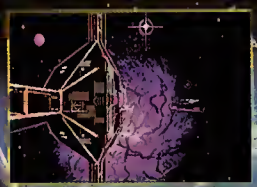

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THE LEARNING GAME

RIPE FOR EXPLORING

LESLIE EISER

With new releases in the educational software market popping up faster than popcorn over a hot flame, it's impossible to cover them all in one column. I've decided to dedicate this space to recent releases from **Broderbund** and **Disney Software**, but you should check out the review of **Sierra's** *Eco-Quest* elsewhere in this issue — it's great, too. Even adult players will be excited and impressed with the graphics, sounds, and playability of these games; just think what they can do for kids!

Bright colors, adorable characters, engaging learning activities, and catchy musical themes are the structural foundations of the two newest titles in Broderbund's Kids Club lineup. Both *The Treehouse* and *The Playroom* provide kids with an environment that begs to be explored, animated, evaluated, and experienced.

Very young users (ages 3 to 6) will love spending time in *The Playroom*, home of Pepper the mouse. They'll soon be clicking on everything they can see—balloons, window shades, clocks, and mouse holes. Each object selected rewards the finder with an animated sequence, or acts as one of six gateways to an educational game. There's a sticker book to assemble using the letters of the alphabet, a 24-hour Time Telling Clock, a spinner toy counting game, a computer that teaches keyboard skills, a board game, and a flip-book.

Youngsters begin by literally jumping into any of these activities, and as they become more comfortable with their surroundings, they'll discover objects to count, specific letters to press to get corresponding pictures in the sticker book, and animated sequences that magically appear when a word is spelled correctly.

All these games are variations on traditional preschool activities, and while most are absorbing and very educational, some suffer in translation to the PC. The Time Telling Clock is boring, and while an electronic flip-book is a cute idea, it's not necessarily worth doing on a computer. Nevertheless, the overall package is excellent.

Older kids (ages 6 to 10) will find *The Treehouse* well worth a visit. The two friendly possums waiting outside invite your kids in to play, gently encouraging them to examine any of the dozens of items hanging from the walls, lying on the floor, or visible through the windows. Most of the objects move, talk, or perform tricks when touched, but four hide the entrances to sophisticated computer games. There's a world of music beneath the synthesizer, a working theater company behind the toy stage, and an Animal Picture Album that teleports players into the backyard zoo. There's even a math game hidden under the Road Rally racing mat.

The Treehouse *is a wonderful game to explore. Everything talks or is animated, from the bag of nuts on the floor to the picture of the owl on the wall.*

Each of these games is strong enough to stand alone, making this package even more impressive. The musical games are particularly stunning, provided your computer's got the right hardware. Players can visit an orchestra, write songs, and listen to compositions employing a huge variety of instruments and sounds, from clarinets to animal voices. Equally nice is the backyard zoo game, where youngsters play games derived from a large database of animals organized by their physical and behavioral characteristics.

Quite different from the free-play format of these programs are the two games from Disney Software. Gorgeous adaptations of traditional games, *Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles* and *Mickey's Memory Challenge* encourage thinking skills without attempting to teach a specific subject. Designed to be played by very young children, all the menus are icon driven, and Disney has removed the childproof copy-protection routines that graced their earlier educational programs. Good thinking, Disney!

Finish one of the 15 puzzles in *Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles* and you'll be rewarded with a skit starring the world famous Disney characters, complete with speech and sound effects. Bright colors, humorous images, and plenty of options should keep kids who like solving jigsaw puzzles well entertained.

Mickey's Memory Challenge is essentially the traditional card game Concentration. There aren't any sound effects here, but there's plenty of game action, and the variety of opponents is especially good. Kids can play alone, against a friend, or race the clock. It's even possible to challenge Goofy, Daisy, or Mickey to a game. If you and your kids like playing memory games, this one's attractive graphics and famous Disney characters make it a good choice.

When you finish this nine-piece puzzle in Mickey's Jigsaw Puzzles, *you get to watch Minnie "play ball!"*

GP

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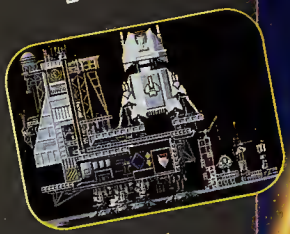

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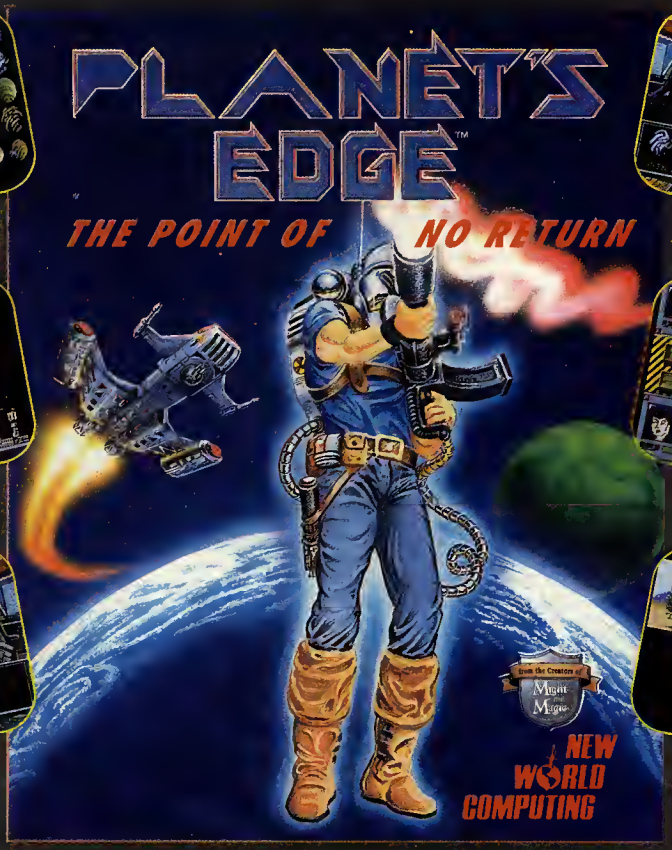

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THE DESKTOP GENERAL

IMPROVING ON PERFECTION?

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

OK, listen up! Those of you who, as a matter of principle, disdain to play any war game that's not authentic down to the exact number of mortar tubes can leave the room right now.

Now, I assume everybody who's still reading plays war games because they're *fun* (never mind the rationalizations we use when the general public looks at us askance!). So it's no news to you that 1991 marked "the return of the *fun* war game" — a quiet revolution in the way these little diversions are put together.

Two of the titles which led that insurgence, *The Perfect General* and *The Lost Admiral*, are fast on their way to becoming all-time classics. These superbly designed and wonderfully replayable games from **QQP** — a company no one had even heard of a year ago — were lavishly praised in these pages (and by every other magazine in the field as well).

Now QQP has issued the *Scenario Disk — World War II Battle Set* for *The Perfect General*, and it makes the original game even more fun than before.

Let's first make it clear what we're talking about. These are not authentic order-of-battle scenarios; nor could they be, without violating the basic, elegant game-system itself. You must still equip your forces by using an allotment of points to "purchase" artillery, tanks, bazooka, and other weapons, which enables you to do stuff like give the Japanese "heavy tanks" when, in reality, the Japanese never fielded any vehicle that even remotely deserved that description.

What you will find are 14 utterly absorbing *approximations* of historical battles; extra ammunition, so to speak, for your imagination. You get beautiful maps, which are authentic (Anzio is a minor work of art). And each side gets

a point pool that reflects, in a general sort of way, the forces available to each side at the start of the battle and as reinforcements later on.

QQP has included some old favorites (Kasserine Pass, Omaha Beach, Kharkov, etc.) as well as some battles — Saipan and Okinawa, to name two good examples — that have seldom, if ever, been re-created on a PC.

My current favorite is the hypothetical Japanese invasion of Oahu in the days following the raid on Pearl Harbor. The

scenario pits an initially outnumbered American defender against a powerful invasion force, and requires a dogged, space-for-time defense until reinforcements arrive from the American mainland.

There's a nice variety, too, in the scale of battles. One programmer included the British airborne attack on Pegasus Bridge, out of homage to the terrific battle scenes devoted to that engagement in *The Longest Day*. It plays very nicely as a company-sized firefight of considerable intensity; on the other end of the scale, there's Sicily and Arnhem.

True, there is a momentary lurch of incredulity when you realize that you're refighting a campaign the size of Anzio with only a small fraction of the number of tanks and guns actually in the real thing. But the game soon becomes *your* Anzio, and there's a certain rush of liberated imagination when that happens.

As in the original game, you can elect to play a basic or a "long" battle, as your mood dictates. And all the same set-up options are available, including handicapping one side or the other to compensate for differences in skill and experience between two human opponents.

Players interested in modem-gaming will be gratified to learn that QQP has included some up-grades that correct the bugs that have been brought to their attention since the original game came out. The system really works best when two humans are competing, anyway, because its very flexibility allows you and your opponent to try a sane, balanced approach to force-configuration, or a wild, go-for-it onslaught by nothing but heavy tanks.

You must already own the original *Perfect General* in order

to play the World War II scenarios, but I can't imagine anyone who *does* own it not wanting this classy add-on package.

Still to come (and boy, am I ready for it!) is a design-your-own scenarios disk. And further down the road is QQP's updated, greatly improved version of the all-time classic, *Empire*. If the same fanatical care for playability found in QQP's earlier titles is reflected in that product, it will be a wargamer's dream come true.

GP

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- THE SEQUEL TO TEAM YANKEE

The year is 1995 ...

Disaffected Renegade Soviet communists, backed by North Korea, have invaded the Pacific atoll of Yama Yama. Your tank platoon, returning from the Persian Gulf, is the closest American unit to the scene .....

Pacific Islands is a hectic race against time.

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- Non-linear gameplay allows you to attack each island in many different ways.
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- Test your mettle in this campaign of over 25 interlinked scenarios.
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- Fast action, 3D real-time tank simulation using Empire's unique bit-mapped technology.
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TEAM YANKEE SCALED THE HEIGHTS - PACIFIC ISLANDS REACHES A NEW SUMMIT!

- *Simultaneous command of four tank units.*
- *View the battlefield from four perspectives.*
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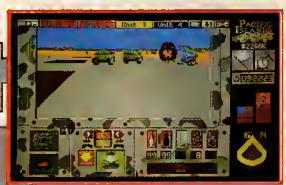
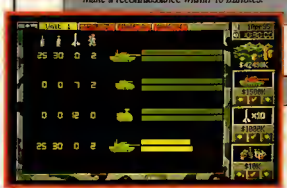
THE SCREENSHOTS ARE ONLY INTENDED TO BE ILLUSTRATIVE OF THE GAME PLAY AND NOT THE SCREEN GRAPHICS WHICH MAY CONSIDERABLY BETWEEN DIFFERENT FORMATS IN QUALITY AND APPEARANCE AND ARE SUBJECT TO THE COMPUTER SPECIFICATIONS. SOME FEATURES MAY ALSO NOT BE AVAILABLE DEPENDING UPON THE COMPUTER SPECIFICATIONS

- *You must destroy all communications facilities as swiftly as possible. The longer you take, the more information the enemy have about your position and strength.*



- *Cope with multiple objectives - can you destroy an airfield, support a convoy, and make a reconnaissance within 40 minutes?*



- *Purchase all your equipment.*
- *Is there enough time and money to repair your damaged tracks and give the crews some rest?*

- *T72s, BMPs, Hughes 500 Helicopters and SA9 Gaskins.*
- *Eight different types of fighting vehicles modelled so that you even see the rivets!*
- *M1 Abrams, M2 Bradleys, M113 APCs, ITVs.*

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ELVIRA II: THE JAWS OF CERBERUS

GARY MEREDITH

You always told her that old Thunderbird would give her nothing but trouble. Fortunately, you remember that the trunk lock doesn't work, so you can search it for goodies.

You knew it wouldn't be long before Elvira needed your help again. The undying gratitude she promised after you saved her neck in *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark* seemed to run out just after she signed a big three-picture deal with the dubious Black Widow Productions. But while that contract may have seemed like a cushy deal, Elvira has an amazing penchant for doing all the wrong things at all the wrong times, and then putting the bite on you for some immediate assistance. So it wasn't much of a shock to receive her rather cryptic summons for help at the start of *Elvira II: The Jaws of Cerberus*.

She's really made a mess of things in this outstanding sequel from Accolade. You'd think that with her knowledge of the occult (if knowledge is the correct term for what she's learned from B-movies) she would have been suspicious of a shady outfit like Black Widow. The place has a pall of death and destruction hanging over it like an impenetrable black cloud — then again, that might just be a hint of today's special at the studio canteen. Anyway, she's missing, and as usual it's up to you to find her before certain otherworldly creatures, in particular a triple-header named Cerberus, have their way with her.

Welcome to Black Widow Productions, where Elvira is Queen...of the casting couch, at least. In case you weren't already leery, be sure to watch your step at all times.

Arriving at the studio, you're immediately confronted with your first corpse — and your first mystery. If you can manage to get into the guardhouse, you'll find the guard has deserted his post for an eternal sleep in the closet. Try to get over your initial revulsion — you'll see a lot worse later on — and go over the place with a fine-toothed comb. That advice, in fact, should apply to every new room or area you enter. At the heart of *Elvira II* is the accumulation of as much junk as you can find — you'll need practically everything available to make the spells necessary to find and defeat Cerberus.

But it's not as simple as hauling everything around until you need an item: the more you carry, the more energy you'll use, and the less agile you'll be in battle. A good strategy is to pick a centrally located area where you can dump everything you don't need at the moment. Then, too, many of the items can be immediately turned into spells, which weigh nothing. All the while, though, keep in mind that this is Elvira's world we're in, and even the most innocent-looking object may harbor deadly surprises. For example, the dining room table in the mansion soundstage is a veritable cornucopia of goodies, but there's one thing on the table best left untouched.

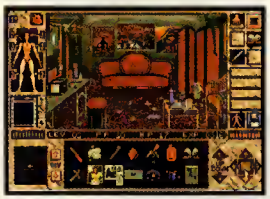
This brings up another key to playing *Elvira II*: save your game early and often. As with most games of this genre, the possibilities for horrible, bloody, disgusting, stomach-turning deaths are myriad. Beyond that, the complexities of solving many of the problems and puzzles are such that it will almost certainly take you many attempts to get through each situation. Getting out of Cerberus' meat locker in the mansion and figuring how to make it past the vampire in the attic are two good examples of where you'll undoubtedly have

Before you leave the main lobby and go traipsing off into the studios, you should probably search the offices on the other end of the building.

While you'll eventually need some costuming help, now is not the time for confronting this old hag. You don't yet have the power to overcome her clawing hand.

to try and try again before you achieve success.

It's also advantageous to read up on all the available spells, especially those used in combat. Since many of the required ingredients are only



This couldn't be anything but Elvira's dressing room! For now, take everything except the makeup case and the lingerie.

vaguely described, it may take a bit of imagination to figure out that you really can use soda cans for making Protection spells.

Elvira II is a rarity in gaming: a sequel that is a truly worthy successor. As good as we found its predecessor, *The Jaws of Cerberus* is, for the most part, a decided improvement. All the elements that made the original game so fascinating — a convoluted plot, bedeviling puzzles, and Elvira's trademark wit — are back, but in a new streamlined format.

There's no time for playing musical doors — take door 2 into the haunted soundstage. Much of what you find here is necessary for success in the other studios.

At the top of the list of improvements is the way in which spells are now mixed and cast. Gone are the manual gymnastics involved in using the red plastic decoder strip with the spell book. Now the spell book is part of the software, and is easily accessed by just clicking on its icon. Once you're in the spell book index, mixing is a simple matter of selecting the spell you want to mix, then dragging the necessary items from your inventory into the mixing area. It's a much quicker process, and you don't have to keep track of that silly red plastic strip. Casting is also a lot more straightforward, and the spellchecker helps you keep track of all the spells you may have running.

Once you've "toyed" with the poltergeist, you can get into the Library, where you'll find valuable tips on how to defeat Cerberus. Take notes — or save the game here — because you can't take the books with you.

Battle, too, is a bit more sophisticated. In addition to the always-popular option of turning tail and hotfooting it to safety, you now have four

Grab everything you can here, but you might want to pass on the entree. Also, don't go near the service window until you've saved your game.

After this sight you'll never be able to look at a cold cut again. Getting out of Cerberus' meat larder will take some good timing, an invisibility shield, and some "style."

The janitor downstairs seems to drift in and out of lucidity, but he can be a big help to your cause. Just don't say anything to offend him, as he can hold a grudge like no one else.

There's obviously a lot to do in this lab — aside from looking for Colin Clive — but for now, just grab all the body parts, chemicals, and test tubes you can carry.

If you were able to conjure up a Turn Undead spell, this zombie should pose no problem. Don't be fooled by the Elvira illusion, however.

She can't be with you in body, but Elvira does manage to visit you spiritually from time to time. You'd be wise to heed her pithy putdowns.

modes of fighting — normal, defensive, fierce, and berserk. You still must find a suitable weapon, however, since you begin the adventure armed with only a rather dull penknife. But thanks to the new interface, which makes it much simpler to incorporate spell-casting into your battle tactics, the lack of a powerful weapon is not quite the problem it might seem, especially if you've made up an ample supply of ice darts and fireballs. Ice darts in particular are very effective on lesser creatures, and require no ingredients to make. Just remember that they, like all spells, take a toll on your Power Points meter.

Dr. Frankenstein III appears to be the prototypical mad scientist. He'll help you with some basic chemistry, however, if you'll only be nice to him.

This vampire is a tough customer, and you have no garlic with you. To defeat him, you'll have to find some way of setting the right "tone."

Elvira II is a true gem, with all of the complexity and humor that made its predecessor such a joy to play. The graphics, for the most part, are a carryover from *Elvira: Mistress of the Dark*, although the interface has, as mentioned above, a more refined appearance. And if you have a sound board, your game experience is much enhanced. (Unfortunately, the sound coming through the PC speaker will *not* enhance anything).

A word of warning: this is not a game you can finish up in an afternoon. There is much to do in preparation for your final meeting with Cerberus, and the six catacomb levels alone will keep you busy for a long while. Also, this is not a game for players with weak stomachs. Although the graphic violence seems to have been toned down a bit from the original, *Elvira II* is still quite bloody — stacks of rotting corpses and severed heads are standard fare. But as the bouncing bimbo of the "B's" would say, it's all in the spirit of good clean fun.

GP

You'll spend a lot of time in the Catacombs, so it pays to make a map of each level. But you must get past these banshees before you can even begin to worry about mapping. Put on all the armor you have and cast any helpful spells before going in.

You'll eventually have to confront this late, lamented fellow, but don't try to grab the script from him until you've built up enough strength and experience.

Give these bats half a chance, and they'll suck you dry before you know it. Don't try to fight them; just keep moving.

To operate the elevator in Studio 1, you must have the key, which can be found on the body of the director. You'll need all the strength you can muster to get past this fellow.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA/MCGA graphics; hard disk required; supports all major sound boards; mouse highly recommended.

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CIVILIZATION

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

Sid Meier and MicroProse set a new standard for panoramic strategy games with *Railroad Tycoon*, which earned a slew of well-deserved awards, including our own PC Game of the Year Award for 1990. It's certainly a tough act to follow, but their latest epic, *Civilization*, takes strategic gaming to new heights. It bears a superficial resemblance to *Tycoon*, but its scope is expanded to include nothing less than the entire history of the human species on this planet — and beyond.

Take advantage of geography — a couple of units can keep a rival bottled up for hundreds of years.

The game unfolds from a god's-eye view, allowing you to control the world through an intuitive and completely mouse-driven interface (you must admit there's something very attractive about a game that lets you alter the destiny of millions by a simple point and click!). Beyond such thrills however, *Civilization* maintains a delicate balance of resource management and military strategy that keeps you on your toes. You'll found dynasties, make great conquests, build wonders to amaze the world, and even journey to the stars.

Civilization begins in the very dawn of human history, some six thousand years ago, with a single group of settlers looking for a place to live. The map appears empty until you've explored it, thus creating a challenge that carries throughout the game. At this point, you can see only your own settlers and the eight squares around them. Surrounded by darkness on all sides, it's easy to understand the fear and superstition felt by many early human settlements.

It's suggested in the game's imposing 128-page manual that you build your first city immediately if the area looks habitable, and this is good advice. After your city is founded, it'll take a few turns to build the military units to defend it, and if your settlers spend too much time (or in some cases *any* time) exploring, a rival may have time to build the one unit he needs to find you and attack your still-undefended city.

Once your city has a couple of militia units and you've explored some of your surroundings, it's time to found another city. It's important early in the game that you understand certain premises: an individual city can grow only so fast, each city can produce only one thing at a time, and the pace of scientific discovery depends on the total research output of all your cities. Add these up and you get a simple rule: all other things being equal, whoever has the most cities is the winner.

Settlers are therefore one of the most important units in the game, and you should produce more as soon as your city can support them. Not only can they found new cities, but they can also vastly increase the productivity of existing ones. Few cities can thrive without work being done.

Always keep an eye on your city displays, especially the city map, that shows which squares are currently being utilized. Your people don't always work in the best areas and, left on their own, they'll usually concentrate on growing food. This is fine initially; more food means faster growth, and as cities get larger, there are more people working to generate resources and trade. But don't hesitate to alter production to suit your current needs: if the city is in an uproar because it doesn't have a temple, for instance, or you're at war, shift production to maximize resources, even if it means creating a food deficit for a short time. Just remember to restore the balance once the crisis is over.

Be leery of exchanging knowledge. Even if the Babylonians had asked nicely, you don't want to give up a technological edge.

Don't ever try to buy off a hostile neighbor, especially when he's Ghengis Khan. He'll just take your money and invade anyway.

Constant and intelligent city management is one of the keys to success. Your cities must grow if your civilization is to advance, but that growth must be carefully controlled. At higher difficulty levels (there are five levels, from "chief" to "emperor"), large populations can be hard to control. So once a city is large enough, regulate growth by developing just enough land for a slow, steady buildup of surplus food. You can even halt a city's growth if you have to. This gives you time (and resources — if they're not growing food, they'll be producing other commodities) to make improvements, like building temples and coliseums, to keep the citizens happy and productive.

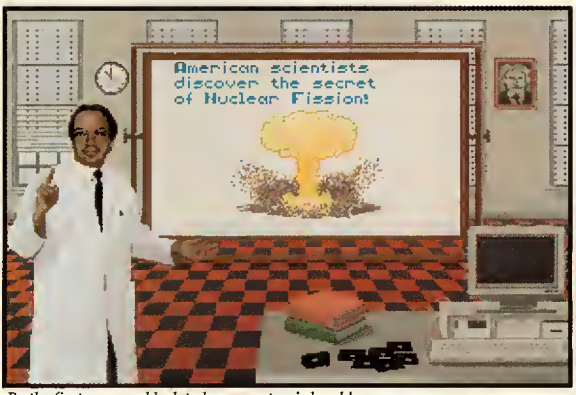
In 1415, a small army of Englishmen led by Henry V defeated thousands of French troops at the battle of Agincourt. The English were able to win primarily because they had something the French didn't: longbows. If history teaches us anything, it shows that even modest technological advantages can translate into dramatic superiority on the battlefield, and for that matter, in the marketplace.

In *Civilization*, scientific research is a quantifiable item — you produce knowledge in much the same way that you grow food. Some city improvements, like libraries, can increase a city's knowledge production (represented on the city display by light bulbs), but most important to the accumulation of knowledge is trade. The greater your trade, the more knowledge you bring in.

Trade, like other commodities, is generated by putting your people to work on map squares with rivers, gold, gems, or most importantly, roads. Plains and grasslands generate food, but with a road they also facilitate trade, so have your settlers begin building roads as soon as you can. Squeeze as much trade from each city as possible by putting roads on every plain and grassland within a city's radius and, later, by sending out caravans. Especially during a game's early stages, you can outstrip your competitors in the technology race by simply having a better road system than they do.

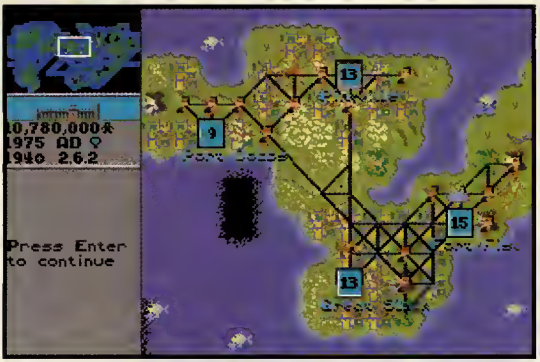
The first advance you'll probably want to work on is The Wheel — once you have it, you immediately gain the ability to produce chariot units. Chariots not only move twice as fast as militia, phalanxes, and settlers, but also have four times their attack value. This gives you the ability to explore more territory in less time, and makes you a fierce opponent if you meet with unfriendly neighbors.

Your success in subsequent advances depends mostly on the nature of the surrounding territory. If there are many tribes nearby, or if one tribe is especially aggressive, develop The Alphabet, Masonry, and then Mathematics. This gives you catapults, the most powerful weapon in the game for a good couple of thousand years. Bronze Working is an important advance as well, since it gives you phalanxes, which are excellent for defense. (In practice, though, the best defense is a strong offense, and you can always take Bronze Working from a captured city.) With chariots, catapults, and a good system of roads, your mighty armies will conquer whole continents.



Be the first on your block to have an atomic bomb!

If there are few competing tribes in the area and lots of resources, choose advances like Currency, Trade, Writing, Ceremonial Burial, etc. These give



Railroads boost resource production by half, so lay a lot of track. In the game's later turns, industrial centers look like huge depots.

the best advantages for rapid growth, with city improvements like marketplaces to increase tax revenue and temples to keep the people content. Also, Map Making, Astronomy, and Navigation will be needed in order to see what's going on in the rest of the world — ignorance can be fatal.

Finally, as a system of government, Despotism is the absolute pits. With Despotism, overall growth is difficult because the production of each map square is severely limited, so discover Monarchy as soon as possible. With the advance of Masonry, you might also want to consider building the Pyramids, which opens the door to establish any form of government you wish, even if you haven't invented it yet — this can give you an important advantage if your civilization has grown substantially in a short period of time.

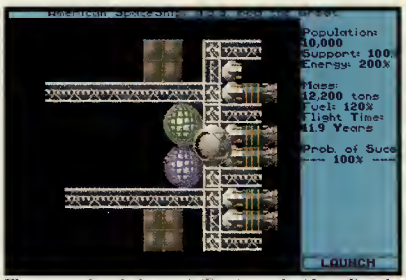
Several hundred years after the battle of Agincourt, a sizable English force equipped with the best rifles in the world were defeated by Zulu warriors armed with spears. History teaches that technology isn't *always* better than tenacity or skill.

War is almost inevitable in *Civilization*. Even if you don't go looking for conquests, some other belligerent tribe will eventually come and find you. It's important to know what's going on in the world, and for this you'll need Diplomat units and ships. Make it a priority to establish embassies with every other tribe in the world as soon as you can. Also, keep at least one ship circling the globe to provide you with updated information on your opponents' movements and where new cities have been founded. If an opponent begins to catch up with you, either in technological advancements or in size, you'd better deal with him soon.

Conquering cities is no walk in the park, so don't attack with infantry. Save the job for siege weapons: catapults, cannon, bombers, and artillery. It's also effective to pillage a city, especially if it's a big one. Loss of food, resources, and trade can reduce the city's defenses as readily (if not as quickly) as bombs. Diplomats can also be effective anti-city units. Send them in ahead of other units to "soften" the city through industrial sabotage, and use them to steal technology before the city is captured — this doubles the number of advances you can take. And if you have the extra money, it's often easier to use a diplomat to incite a revolt and "buy" a city rather than conquer it — this way you gain the advantage of having a city with all of its improvements intact.

When you go to war, your best course is to drop everything and devote yourself to *total* war: switch your government to monarchy or communism, make sure every city has a barracks, gear your cities to produce nothing but military units, and do not stop until the enemy is thoroughly devastated. Just taking them down a peg or two will only buy some time. If you allow an enemy to survive, particularly if he started the conflict, you can bet that peace will last only as long as it takes for your opponent to re-equip himself. Aggressive tribes, like the Greeks or Aztecs, will attack without provocation, even when they're clearly outnumbered and outclassed. If they surprise you and steal a technology like Tanks, you're in trouble.

Although you can choose to play on Earth, a typical game builds a new geographical world from scratch. Since your overall strategy hinges largely on the availability of resources and the relative trustworthiness of neighboring tribes, you must use a fresh approach with each game.



The eventual goal of your civilization — besides ruling the planet — is to colonize other worlds.

But should you reach a point where you think you've got the whole game figured out, try using the game's customizing feature and tailor a planet to your own liking, or choose another of the game's five difficulty levels. With this kind of lasting challenge, *Civilization* is probably the most playable game you're likely to find this year.

GP

Hardware Requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA/MCGA, EGA, and Tandy graphics; supports Roland, AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Tandy sound cards; mouse recommended.

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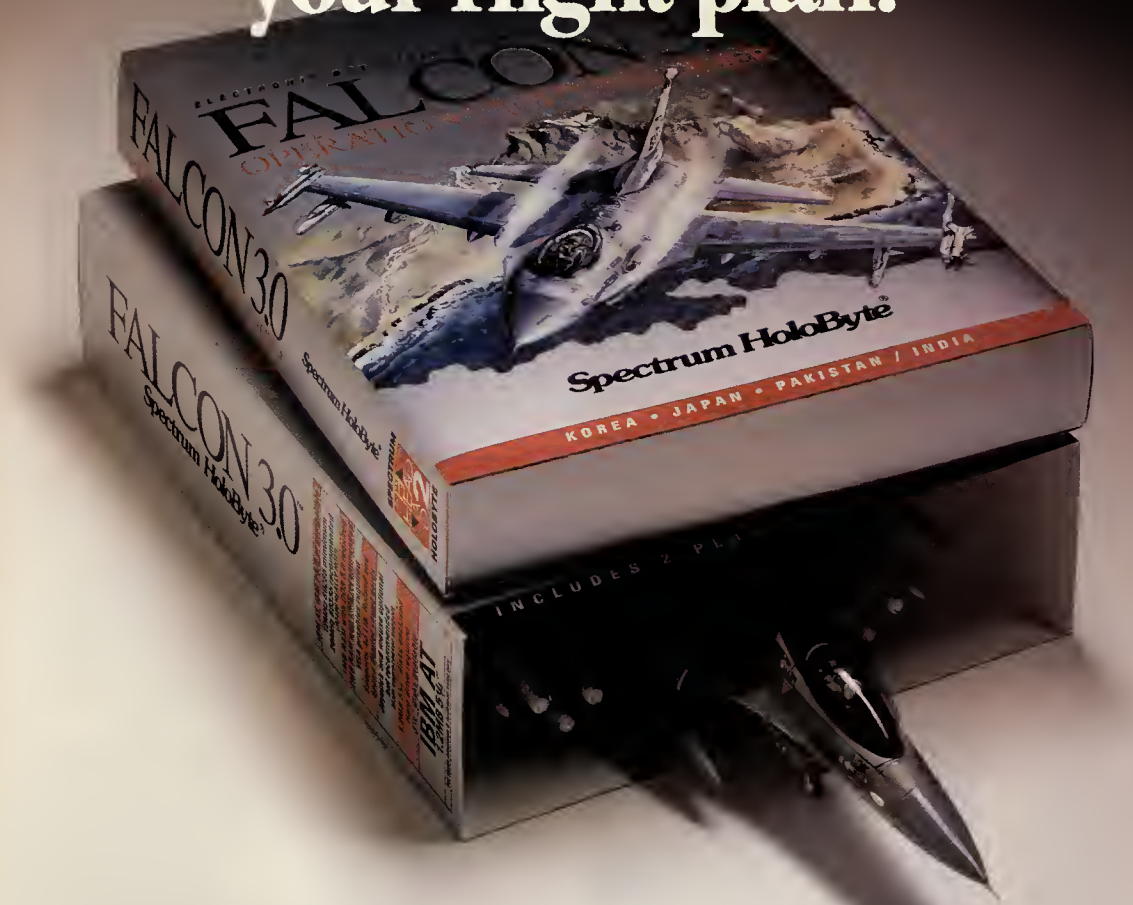

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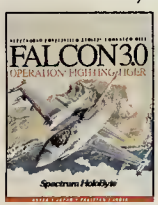

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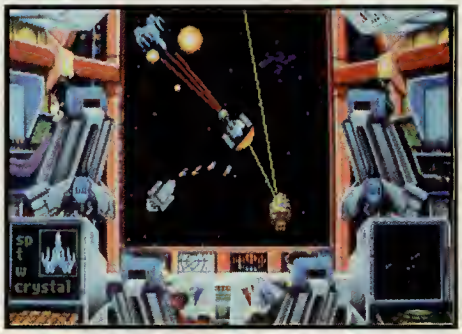
PLANET'S EDGE

JEFF LUNDRIGAN



Agility is crucial in space combat — get behind your opponent, where most of his weapons are ineffective. Of course, even the best tactics fail when you're badly outnumbered.

In the year 2045, a mysterious ship of extrasolar origin was discovered by Earth's observation network on Luna Base. Messages of greeting were sent to the ship, but as the strange, silent craft came ever closer, the messages became less and less friendly. The extraterrestrial ship, or ETS as it came to be called, either would not or could not respond. Finally, it took up orbit around Earth, and in a blast of electromagnetic white noise, all communications on Luna Base were violently interrupted. When communications were re-established, it was obvious that Luna's troubles had only just begun — the Earth was missing!

But *something* was still there. The Moon hadn't gone flying off its orbit, so something with the same mass as Earth was still hanging in space, and the ETS was still in orbit as well, partially wrecked and drifting. As near as could be determined from the remaining clues, the alien craft was part of a scientific experiment, a test of what was referred to only as the "Centauri Device." Apparently, the Earth had not been destroyed, but was instead trapped in a space-time rift caused by the experiment.

You'll get a lot of warnings like this. Most planets with injunctions are inhabited by aliens covering a monopoly on rich sources of raw materials — blast them as soon as you're able.

In the weeks that followed, Luna's best scientists worked feverishly to decipher the documents they'd found, and duplicate the faster-than-light drives found aboard the ETS. After all, whatever a Centauri Device was, it was a sure bet you couldn't get one at the Lunar Wal-Mart. No, if the Earth was ever going to be returned from the void, someone was going to have to go out among the stars in search of an answer.

That someone is you, if you play all the way through New World Computing's latest title, *Planet's Edge*. This game is, if nothing else, *huge*; one of those monster games that show up every once in a while, the sort that will gladly take a hundred-plus hours of your life away and probably ask for more. The galaxy is a pretty big place, and the game is so open-ended you can go almost anywhere at any time. That gives you something on the order of a hundred different star systems to explore, with between one and ten planets in each system. That's a lot of ground to cover any way you look at it.

Of course, you've probably already guessed that your jaunt through the stars won't be unopposed. Although some alien races are peaceful, even benevolent, there are pirates and rogues out there as well. So in addition to the eight components of the Centauri Device, you'll also have to be on the lookout for new technologies and the materials to build them. Otherwise, some bug-eyed green thing is going to blast you into smithereens. In fact, there are really two different games here, intermingled but distinct: the first is the intergalactic "save Earth" adventure, and the other involves intergalactic trade and resource exploration.

Every time you need new equipment, such as better engines or even something as simple as first-aid kits, you must use various resources to produce them: radioactive elements, metals, liquids, etc. Luna Base has only a limited amount of these resources, and completely lacks others, like Alien Organics. So periodically you have to spend time in exploration and trade to locate new sources of raw materials and bring them back home. One of the reasons that *Planet's Edge* takes as long as it does is due to all the time spent roaming the galaxy, cataloging dozens of planets in the hope that one of them might have something you can use.

Especially in the first third of the game, when your ships aren't so technologically advanced, it takes an awfully long time to get from place to place.

This isn't unrealistic, and there is a certain amount of satisfaction to be found bringing in a huge haul of "Rare Elements" from, say, Unakalhai Prime — but we're talking about a good couple of minutes (maybe even five or ten, depending on the distance you have to go and the computer you're playing on) just staring at the screen waiting for your ship to get where it's going. Space flight just shouldn't be this *dull*. The idea of having a resource management side to the game is a good one — it just doesn't really work when you have to do so much flying around to begin with.

Fortunately, the game's adventure elements tend to make up for the dull stretches, despite a slightly quirk interface. If you hail another ship and it turns out to be hostile, there's no way to break off communications without going into battle (a battle you might very well lose). Each of your four characters can only carry so much, and if he or she goes over the maximum number of inventory items, the game just drops an item from the top of the list *without* letting you know of the loss.

Overall, though, there's so much to do, the storyline is so intricate, and it all looks so good, you'll start playing and you won't be able to stop.

Ground combat is pretty straightforward, and one of the most user-friendly parts of the game. You shoot them, they shoot you, and whoever drops first loses.

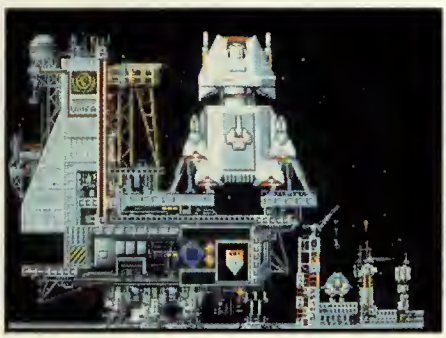
You begin by taking your first ship, the *Ulysses*, to Alpha-Centauri, but things quickly get complicated. You're usually given clues and suggestions about where to go next, and it's a good idea to follow that advice — but, to the game's credit, it's not *absolutely* necessary that you do.

You can go anywhere, anytime. If you've discovered something interesting while looking for resources, and you think you can handle it, give it a shot. Situations simply exist, and you're free to deal with them as you see fit. The galaxy is divided into eight sectors, and for most of the game each sector can be looked at as a separate, almost self-contained adventure.

The key thing to remember as you explore is *be friendly*. You'll find that the Earth isn't the only planet in trouble. Almost everywhere you go, there's another race headed for catastrophe of one form or another. Help out the different civilizations you come in contact with, and they'll help you out in turn. Very few of the beings you encounter will deliberately try to mislead you. As a general rule, if someone doesn't like you, they'll let you know.

The oldest adventure gaming advice, however, is still the best: write down what everyone tells you, take everything that isn't nailed down, and remember that it's impossible to save a game too often. If you've got the time and can adjust to some idiosyncracies in game play, *Planet's Edge* has the goods.

GP



Over time, you discover plans for many different types of ships, and you can outfit them any way you like for a specific task, be it exploring, trading, or going to war.

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; hard disk; VGA/MCGA, EGA, or Tandy graphics; supports Roland, AdLib, Sound Blaster, and Tandy 3-voice sound cards; supports mouse.

BATTLE CHESS: FOR MPC

NEIL RANDALL

Battle Chess isn't new. It first appeared on the Commodore Amiga a few years ago, and caused such a stir that it was ported to the Mac, the PC, and other systems. Now it's been released for the latest in technological advances, the multimedia personal computer (MPC). And that means this most recent incarnation has even better sound and graphics than before.

To begin by answering two almost inevitable questions, you can indeed buy a non-MPC version of *Battle Chess*; just make sure you pull the right one off the shelf. Second, if you want the multimedia version, make sure you have all the equipment and software you'll need to run an MPC product: a 286 or better (the MPC standard actually calls for a 386SX) with VGA graphics, a CD-ROM drive, CD-ROM drivers (usually included with the drive), and a software product called Multimedia Windows. This is just Microsoft Windows 3.0 with "multimedia extensions," but you can't buy the extensions separately. Windows 3.1 comes complete with the extensions, so if you don't already have Windows be sure to get 3.1. You can also make use of — but don't actually need — one of many supported sound boards. If you're really interested, Creative Labs, NEC, Media Vision, and others offer full MPC packages, including CD-ROM, sound board, and Multimedia Windows.

As for *Battle Chess* itself, it's nothing more and nothing less than a chess program with an attitude. Like the Chessmaster and Sargon series, *Battle Chess* lets you play chess against a computer or human opponent. Where *Battle Chess* differs from the rest is that it offers superb animated action.

Action? In a chess game? Doesn't chess have a solid reputation as the world's worst spectator event? Well, not any more. In *Battle Chess*, your pieces are animated. When you tell the bishop to move three squares along its diagonal, it doesn't just slide there, it almost slithers. The queen sidles, the knight gallops, and the rook turns into a rock giant (strangely resembling the Cookie Monster) and lumbers. And the animation is superb.

But that's not all. When one piece moves into an enemy square, the captured piece doesn't just disappear. In *Battle Chess*, they actually do battle (hence the game's title). First they square off, then they attack and defend, and finally the conquered piece is eliminated. The game isn't changed — there's no chance that an attacked piece will win the battle — but the result is excellent (if at times gory) entertainment.

Interplay takes the MPC version of *Battle Chess* to the limit of its hardware potential. Movements are fluid, battles are detailed, and the sounds are spectacular. Just install the program (and put as much on the hard drive as you can), put the disk in the CD-ROM, fire up the sound board and the stereo, and away you go.

Admittedly, buying all that MPC equipment is a huge investment simply to play a game of chess. But other MPC titles will soon be available, and in the meantime it's a great way to show off what your PC can do.

Finally, if you want to be a real stickler about this sort of thing, it plays a good game of chess. At least, it beats me most of the time at level 1 and always at level 2 and above. Then again, my 12-year old daughter beats me all the time as well. And she doesn't require a CD-ROM drive.

GP

Hardware requirements: 286 or higher (386SX or higher recommended); VGA graphics; CD-ROM drive with Microsoft CD-ROM extensions; Microsoft Windows 3.0 or higher with Multimedia Extensions (included in Microsoft Windows 3.1), 2 MB RAM (4 MB recommended); hard disk.

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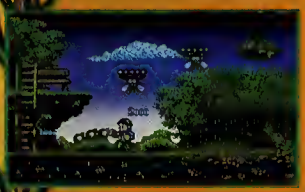

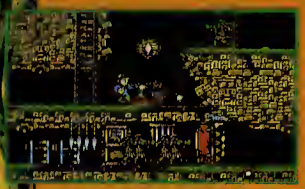

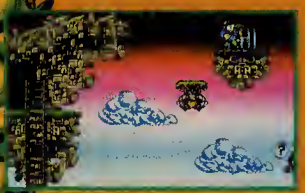

Screen shots shown are from the Amiga version of the game.

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STAR TREK: 25TH ANNIVERSARY

MATTHEW A. FIRME

Doing a Star Trek game is a little like putting on a production of *Hamlet*; chances are your audience is already *very* familiar with the subject, and ready to jump on even the smallest variation from the source. Does that mean you should avoid doing *Hamlet* or a Star Trek game? No. But it does mean that you've got to be careful.

In the case of Interplay's *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary*, the designers were obviously well aware of the demands placed on them by their subject. They've done a good job of remaining true to the characters and spirit of the original series, right down to the ever-present tricorders and the expendable security officer. Purists will notice a few bits of uncharacteristic dialogue, and may object to the occasional joke made at the series' expense. But on the whole, even the most devout Trekkers should be pleased.

Occasionally, you must pick a dialogue response for Kirk to make. If you know anything about the series, it's easy to recognize an inappropriate response.

Though the game is based on the original television series, it doesn't merely recast old episodes in a computer-gaming mold. The seven adventures in *25th Anniversary* are new, written especially for the game. Each adventure is like a mini-episode of the series, beginning with an entry in the captain's log or orders from Star Fleet, then building to a potentially dangerous climax before a resolution is reached and the ship heads off to the next star system.

The episodes all begin on the bridge of *The Enterprise*. It's here that you, as Captain Kirk, will steer the ship, issue orders to your crew (Uhura, Sulu, Scotty, Chekhov — they're all present), and control shields, weapons, and damage repairs during combat. You can even log on to the ship's computers, requesting information on just about any subject in the game.

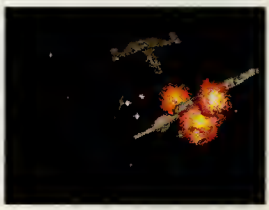
Once your course of action becomes clear, you'll beam down with your landing party for some hands-on action. Again you control Kirk, this time using an efficient point-and-click interface. Click your left mouse button and a human outline pops onscreen; then click on the mouth to Talk, on the eyes to Look, etc. The interface is simple and straightforward, and never becomes intrusive.

It's during these sections of the game that you'll find yourself lost in the premise, actually becoming James T. Kirk. Just as in the series, these sections demand that you think problems through, look for anything out of the ordinary, and direct the considerable talents of your crew. By the second or third episode, you may even catch yourself walking with that Kirk swagger.

The space combat scenes are good, too. You've got to swing your great vessel to bear on enemy targets, blasting away with photon torpedoes and phasers, while assessing damage to your ship and ordering the appropriate repairs. And in the final mission, you'll battle against a duplicate *Enterprise* and two Elasi pirate ships, all at once. When you finally win this one, you'll jump to your feet and cheer.

But after that cheer, you'll see the credits roll — pointing out the game's major flaw. There's just not *enough* to the game.

That woman is Dr. Carol Marcus, and the big missile at the center of the screen is a preliminary Genesis device.



In the final battle scene, try to take out the Elasi pirates and their modified Klingon warships. They fire three photon torpedoes at once — more than even The Enterprise *can withstand.*

Although each episode varies a bit in difficulty, none is terribly challenging. If you've played other graphic adventures, you'll know much of what this one expects of you. And if you're a *Star Trek* fan, you'll know what each member of your party should investigate, and you'll know which of Kirk's dialogue choices is correct. I played up to the final battle scene in seven or eight hours.

Considering the hour and a half (minimum) it takes to install the game, and box copy that claims you'll "scan and survey hundreds of fractally generated worlds," "interact with dozens of alien races" and experience "thousands of state-of-the-art, 3-D digitized, space action scenes," seven episodes and a few hours of playing time seems rather skimpy.

Of course, any game that leaves you wanting more has done *something* right. By that reckoning, *Star Trek: 25th Anniversary* is one of the best games of the year.

GP

Hardware requirements: 550K minimum memory; VGA graphics; 10-Mhz or faster; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and Pro-Spectrum sound boards; mouse recommended.

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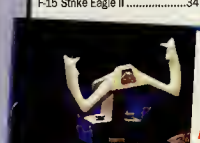

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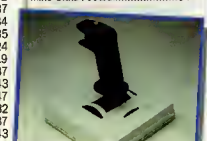

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THE ROCKETEER

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

Based loosely on last summer's movie, **Disney Software**'s *The Rocketeer* chronicles the exploits of Cliff Secord, racing pilot, stunt flyer, and part-time hero. He didn't plan on the part-time hero bit, it just sort of happened when a gang of thugs got into a shootout with the FBI in Cliff's hangar. After the gunfight, he discovered that someone had left behind a mysterious rocket pack.

Always the daredevil, Cliff immediately tried the pack out, but along with the thrill of hurtling through the skies, the rocket brought unwanted attention. Soon both his girlfriend and his mechanic were in a heap of trouble — the crooks who had stolen the pack to begin with wanted it back, and so did the Nazi spies the crooks had stolen it for.

The digitized graphics in The Rocketeer *are drop-dead gorgeous.*

This arcade-style game opens with Cliff's girlfriend being kidnapped by Nazi spies. Nearly every stage of the game is different: *The Rocketeer* is an air race in stage one, a side-scrolling shooter in the second stage, a shooting gallery in the third, and so on. The trouble here is that there's nothing in the game that's terribly original or that even plays especially well.

To make matters worse, the difficulty level is ridiculous right from the start. Cliff has to win three air races in a row, the first two flying planes and the last while flying the rocket pack. The other pilots get increasingly aggressive with each race, which isn't unexpected, but if Cliff even gets bumped while wearing the rocket pack he immediately crashes.

In stage three, Cliff gets into a gun battle with Nazis in an airplane hangar. The Nazis get to hide behind planes and crates, but Cliff is given no chance at all to take cover. After killing about a thousand Nazis, his energy level dropping steadily because he's taken so many bullets that he's developed lead poisoning, Cliff gets in *real* trouble when a Nazi hovercraft (!) shows up armed with .50-cals.

The less difficult stages are somewhat dull—two nearly identical side-scrolling shooters that require a little tricky maneuvering, but nothing special.

Maybe all this wouldn't be so bad except that when you first see the game, it looks like it has the potential to be a classic. *The Rocketeer* makes fantastic use of superb digitized graphics, among the best we've seen. Between stages you're treated to some equally beautiful comic-art storyboards, based on the original *Rocketeer* graphic novel by Dave Stevens.

In the final stage, Cliff battles Nazis hand-to-hand atop an airborne zeppelin. Take a good look — it's doubtful you'll ever get to see this just by playing.

The game is designed to be played with Disney's own Sound Source, which plugs into your computer's parallel printer port and plays both music and digitized voices. A few of Disney's early titles could *only* be heard through the Sound Source (or internal PC speaker), but they've begun to make their games compatible with other sound boards. *The Rocketeer* makes frequent (you might even say conspicuous) use of real voices, and players without a Sound Source would have been left high and dry, so this is a welcome change.

Unfortunately, there seems to be a common denominator in several of Disney's entertainment titles — fine graphics and fun sound tacked onto lackluster games. Last year's *Dick Tracy* and *Arachnophobia* had similar problems. If there were some substance to go with all the flash, *The Rocketeer* would be an excellent game. But after an hour or so of increasing frustration, the hot-dog graphics serve only as a dull reminder that there's more to a game than meets the eye.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; 10Mhz 286; VGA or EGA graphics; supports Disney Sound Source and AdLib, PS/1 Audio Card, Roland MT-32/Lapc-1, Sound Blaster (386 required, MCV not supported), and Tandy sound cards; joystick recommended.

OBITUS

JEFF LUNDRIGAN

The side-scrolling "parallax" sections consist of fairly simple arcade-style sequences.

The kingdom of Middlemere was beset by more than its share of troubles. The sons of King Cirkassia couldn't bring themselves to share the land, and thousands perished as the kingdom was torn by civil war.

Then a great machine appeared in the center of Middlemere. Its purpose was unknown, but after time passed and nothing happened, the warring brothers realized that fear of the machine was so pervasive that they could control the people just by owning it. In their battle for possession, the machine was split into four parts. The warlords retreated into their castles, and Middlemere disappeared into the mists of time, all but forgotten.

Untold years later, history professor Wil Mason was driving home through the rain one night. As luck would have it,

The game's first person perspective scrolls by smoothly — but still has its problems.

his car broke down, and in his search for shelter he came upon a mysterious tower. Concerned only with keeping dry, he headed inside and feel into a deep sleep.

When he awoke, Wil was amazed to find himself strangely dressed — his sport coat had somehow been transformed into a leather jerkin. Through the tower's windows he could see that the road of the previous night had been replaced by a dirt path through the woods. What was going on?

A large silver key lay on the floor, and picking it up, he found that it fit one of the tower's doors. Unbeknownst to him, he was now smack in the land of Middlemere, and the four parts of the machine are apparently his only ticket back to the present.

So his adventure began, and so begins *Obitus*. There are several good things about this game, first and foremost being the graphics. Although they're only 16-color VGA, they look great — just as you might expect from its publisher, Psygnosis, whose games almost always *look* great. With the appropriate sound card, you'll also get some nice digitized sound. The maze sections, which make up most the game, take place from a first-person perspective, with scenery smoothly scrolling by on either side — quite impressive stuff.

Besides the maze sections, there's side-scrolling action to be found as well, in the game's "parallax" and "interior" sequences. Here you control Wil as he runs, jumps, and shoots his way through forests and castles. These are pretty simple as arcade sequences go, but they do provide some variety in game play.

And the variety is needed, because *Obitus* also has a number of problems. For all its visual pizazz, it still belongs to that species of game (hopefully a dying breed) that requires you to scour every single inch of a maze for potentially important items strewn about at random. You know: take a step, look around, pick stuff up; take a step, look around, pick stuff up, and so on, *ad nauseam*. You make a map and literally check every square, because "the most unlikely items may come in handy later on."

The game's first-person perspective — the one that scrolls by so smoothly — actually compounds the problem. It limits your vision to what's directly in front of you, which means you must turn and look directly at all eight points of the compass to ensure you don't overlook anything. Although it's somewhat amusing to picture your character in the middle of a hostile forest, doing a little turn with every step like some demented ballerina out for a stroll, the constant spinning in place will probably send you reaching for the Dramamine.

But if you don't mind a "search every nook" sort of game, and you can handle the induced vertigo, *Obitus* will probably satisfy. It's not the best example of this genre, but it's big and genuinely challenging.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, CGA, Hercules, or Tandy graphics; supports AdLib, Roland MT32, and Sound Blaster sound cards; mouse recommended.

FREE DC!

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

At first glance, the union seemed to hold great promise: combine the talents of a well-known game designer responsible for an impressive string of hits (Kellyn Beck, creator of *Defender of the Crown, Rocket Ranger*, and 1990's prize-winning *Centurion*) with the graphic genius of the legendary Claymation studios (remember the California Raisins commercials?), and turn them loose on the PC gaming world under the name **Cineplay Interactive.**

But after slogging through *Free DC!*, Cineplay's first offering, we're disappointed to report that this tantalizing collaboration has produced a lackluster game, one that seems even more mediocre when you consider its pedigree.

The "Hairy-Faced Stone Man Shelter" — you know it better as the Lincoln Memorial. Other Washington landmarks have similarly cute names.

Free DC! is a role-playing adventure in which the player takes the part of a hard-boiled detective named Avery Zedd, who awakens from cryogenic suspension to find himself in the middle of a zoo where humans are the species on exhibit and robots are the keepers. Zedd, who's been deposited in the zoo along with a robot companion named Wattson, has been given 12 hours by his robot-keepers to find a renegade specimen who has disrupted the routine of the zoo by somehow managing to build a device that instantly deactivates all robots within a 50-meter range.

This character is the product of claymation, but you'd never know it from the minimal animation. More creative use of this process would have given the game a much-needed shot in the arm.

Zedd battling a robot, something you'll see quite a bit of in this game.

Zedd must travel from location to location, uncovering pieces of equipment which a possibly demented human scientist can assemble into a super-weapon. He also needs to locate increasingly powerful laser weapons for defense against the attacking Death Poodles, Funnelheads, and Red Knights — robots who rampage out of control after having been short-circuited by that same scientist.

Most of the locations in the game are based on actual Washington D.C. landmarks, given clever ha-ha names for purposes of the game. Zedd travels back and forth — a *lot* — talking to people, most of them reclusive if not actually hostile, and sometimes goes off on mini-quests that help further the larger objectives of the game.

The idea of a "human zoo," located on the site of present-day government bureaucracies and overseen by emotionless robots, has the potential for some hilarious satire. But after several hours of repetitious comings and goings (interrupted only by the excessive and ultimately obnoxious number of violent encounters with Death Poodles and such), the game just stops being entertaining.

What's missing in *Free DC!* are the very qualities of zaniness and creativity that make the Claymation animated features so wonderful. In fact, one has to look very, very carefully even to see where any Claymation effects were used.

The script attempts to keep up a line of snappy patter throughout the game, but the dialogue is flat, and the humor — mostly word-play about robots, on the order of, "Why, you fugitive from a junkyard!" — is strained enough to make you wince.

Even worse is the *spoken* dialogue, three megs worth of it, that can be yours to savor if you have a Sound Blaster card. In an apparent attempt to save money, Beck and company read the lines themselves instead of hiring actors for the task, and their delivery is stilted and amateurish beyond tolerance.

Not even the graphics are very special — mostly some ruined buildings and generic-looking shrubbery, along with the various types of robots. If there is one quality the Claymation folks are known for, it's brilliance of visual imagination, but you'd never know that from what's on display here.

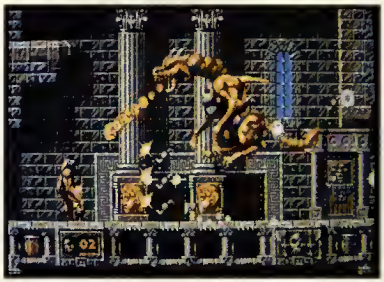
Free DC! had the potential to be a delight, but somewhere, somehow, things took a wrong turn and the result is a fizzle. Given the kind of talent assembled for this project, game players had every right to expect something much better than this drab exercise.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; hard disk; VGA or MCGA graphics; supports Sound Blaster, Roland MT-32 and LPAC-1, AdLib, and Tandy 3-voice sound cards; mouse recommended.

GODS

STEPHEN POOLE



Don't be afraid to sacrifice one of your lives studying a guardian's attack. Once you've learned its pattern, you shouldn't have too much trouble.

The Bitmap Brothers have done it again. With the release of *Gods*, from Konami, this U.K.-based development team proves that it ranks among the best at bringing sophisticated, addictive, and rewarding arcade action to the PC.

Last year they gave us *Speedball 2*, a futuristic sports game that garnered a Game Player's PC Excellence award. *Speedball 2* was an outstanding game, but *Gods*, though worlds apart in setting and game play, is even more compelling, an exceptional blend of action, strategy, and puzzle-solving that's as challenging as it is beautiful. And let there be no doubt — this is a gorgeous game, with colors and shading that might convince you that your PC has died and been reincarnated as an Amiga.

The game puts you in the role of an ancient hero who has been challenged by the mythic Greco-Roman gods to reclaim the city they long ago abandoned to a disgustingly hideous assortment of beasts and thieves. You begin at the outskirts of the city, and from there battle your way through the temple, the labyrinth, and the underworld. Each level has three stages; at the end of each level you square off against a huge, powerful guardian. Despite their awe-inspiring size, however, the guardians are usually easy to defeat — after you've lost several lives learning their patterns of attack.

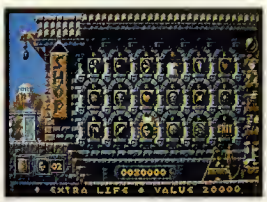
An incredible variety of fantastic monsters stands ready to thwart you at every turn. You'll meet three basic types of enemies — killers track you relentlessly until you dispose of them; fliers swoop down to drain you of energy; and thieves, though primarily hellbent on robbing you of the treasure you've collected, will settle for your life if you don't have any loot.

And these aren't monsters stamped out of some weary videogame mold, either. You'll face minotaurs, winged creatures with human heads, armless mutants spitting laser blasts — many of them are too bizarre to describe in this limited space.

You pick up a knife as you enter the city, but you have the chance to upgrade your weaponry through each stage. The treasure and money you accumulate can be used to purchase weapons, potions, and food that you find in the shops you enter at various points in the game.

It's here in the shops where strategy comes into play. In most arcade-style games, you assume that it's best to pick up stronger weapons as you progress. But in *Gods*, weapon selection is a subtle process; a weapon that's great for killing monsters may not be useful, say, for smashing crumbling bricks to reveal a cache of booty.

Besides dealing with monsters and pondering over what sort of weapons to carry, you'll also have to solve some neat little puzzles. There's nothing heavy duty, though, and if you don't see the solution right away you'll probably stumble across it sooner rather than later.



You enter shops like this one at various points in the game. As you progress, more and more items become available for purchase.

At the start of the first labyrinth stage, for example, you acquire a time bomb. If you keep going left to right (*Gods* scrolls horizontally and vertically) and use your bomb to destroy a deadly beehive, your bomb is taken away, depriving you of the chance to use it in a couple of other spots where it could come in very handy.

Topping all this off is a great soundtrack complete with ultracool digitized speech samples (provided you have a sound board with a voice chip) in the introduction. The perfectly synchronized sound effects during game play are even more convincing because they're used sparingly — you won't have to worry about auditory overkill while trying to determine the best course of action.

Unless you have an undying hate for PC arcade games, you really should try your hand at *Gods*. After all, if it says "Bitmap Brothers," it's got to be good.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, or Tandy Graphics; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and Tandy sound cards; joystick highly recommended.

ECO-QUEST: THE SEARCH FOR CETUS

LESLIE EISER

From the opening cartoon and the delightful tongue-in-cheek humor to the sophisticated graphics and the intriguing musical score, *Eco-Quest: The Search for Cetus* is vintage Sierra. Don't get confused by the overly youthful appearance of the hero on the cover -- this is an adventure game with an educational motif that will keep anyone from 9 to 99 glued to their computer.

As Adam, skilled diver and underwater explorer, it's your job to find out what happened to Cetus, the Great Whale King. The first step is to become friendly with Delphineus, the dolphin found trapped in an old drift net floating in the waters of the Caribbean. Once you follow him to his deep-water home in Euria, you must then help out the troubled citizens of that beautiful place. You'll have plenty of time to explore the sunken gardens and temples of Euria and the still, pristine beauty of a coral reef as you attempt to discover what's threatening the safety of the aquatic creatures that make this part of Planet Earth their home.

Eco-Quest is both beautiful and informative.

The bad guys of this story are reckless humans, carelessly polluting the environments of other creatures and indirectly ruining the world for themselves as well. But not all the people you meet are villains. Many are ecologists and marine enthusiasts, determined to help clean up the underwater environment before it is damaged beyond repair.

Much of the educational aspect of *Eco-Quest* comes from the detailed descriptions of the many inhabitants of the underwater world Adam explores. Every fish and every coral formation is described, sometimes providing valuable clues to the puzzles that must be solved before Cetus can be rescued, but more often than not the descriptions are purely educational.

As Adam slowly swims through the game, you'll also be learning about some of the ways mankind has threatened the existence of the coral reefs, as well some of the things we've been able to do to make them healthy again. The accuracy of much of the information provided is particularly appealing. From the octopus that attacks a mirror because he thinks it's another octopus to the anemone that helps its coral host by consuming the algae that threatens to destroy it, Sierra has done its research remarkably well.

Eco-Quest is aimed squarely at kids, and consequently there are some differences between this game and more traditional Sierra fare. For example, there are a few more hints than you'd normally expect in a Sierra adventure. It's also more difficult to get lost: areas are locked off until you've acquired the necessary tools, making it harder to wander aimlessly. To make the overall package even more appealing to a young audience, there's a copy of Adam's EcoNews with several important hints, an ecological crossword puzzle, a mix-and-match game for "Reef Experts," and much more.

This isn't a pretty sight, but it can be cleaned up — if you can find a way to let the authorities know exactly where this mess is located.

It's great to be able to help out a new friend. Too bad some kids didn't think about the turtles before they let go of that helium-filled balloon.

Sierra doesn't say that a mouse is required, but use one if you have it — the keyboard and joystick routines are pretty crude and uncomfortable. And you'll enjoy the game much more if you own one of the supported sound boards -- the wonderful fish noises, from dolphin clicks to whale cries, are well worth hearing. I used the inexpensive Disney Sound Source to hear the speech and sound effects and an AdLib card for the music, and the results were very impressive. Even the bubble noises as Adam breathes into his scuba gear are realistic.

Eco-Quest is a fine addition to the impressive line of games from Sierra On-Line. It's a safe bet that your family won't stop playing until Cetus is found, and chances are they'll be ready to clean up some other places. There's an *Eco-Quest II* rumored to be already in the works, so hopefully they won't have to wait very long before they can get started on a new adventure.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; 286 or faster; VGA graphics (EGA version available separately); supports most popular sound cards and Disney Sound Source; mouse highly recommended.

BUCK ROGERS: MATRIX CUBED

MATTHEW A. FIRME

The battle sequences are the best part of Matrix Cubed. *The vast array of weaponry available to you, and the freedom to move your party as you like and take advantage of your surroundings, adds immeasurably to the game.*

Although SSI's Advanced Dungeons and Dragons games are critically acclaimed best-sellers, the fantasy context of the AD&D world tends to exclude many gamers (this reviewer included). While we might enjoy the role-playing aspect, the idea of roaming a medieval world of orcs, elves, dragons, and wizards just doesn't interest some of us. It doesn't capture our *imaginations*.

But what if the role-playing mechanics of the series are left unchanged, and a new world is substituted for the usual AD&D settings? That's exactly what SSI did in last year's *Buck Rogers: Countdown to Doomsday*, and that simple change of venue is enough to give even the most avowed dragon-hater a chance to enjoy SSI's intricate, detailed role-playing system.

Now the Buck Rogers saga continues with *Buck Rogers: Matrix Cubed*. Again, you're thrust into the twenty-fifth century, a world of political intrigue, epic struggle, and mind-boggling scientific advances. Earth has been ravaged by centuries of exploitation at the hands of the Russo-American Mercantile (RAM), a sort of mega-corporation fueled by the planet's resources. Although the New Earth Organization (NEO) — headed by Buck Rogers, and the group to whom your loyalties belong — has managed to regain control of Earth, RAM's bases on Mars and throughout the Asteroid Belt remain powerful.

In the Losangelorg Sprawls, your party meets Loa-Loa, the leader of the Leeches gang. She's one of the only people you can trust in ruined Los Angeles.

As *Matrix Cubed* begins, your party of rugged adventurers is on a space station orbiting Mercury, sent by Colonel Rogers to seek the allegiance of the new Mercurian Sun King. While there, you meet a scientist who tells you of his theory to create a Matrix Device. The device will transform any matter into whatever new form is desired — just the thing to repair the scarred Earth.

But before you can take the scientist to NEO's Salvation Base to meet with Buck Rogers, he's kidnapped by a new terrorist organization, PURGE, dedicated to the Prevention of Unwanted Research and Genetic Engineering. The group seeks to destroy all genetically engineered lifeforms, or Gennies, created to aid in the colonization of the other planets. PURGE fights to reclaim the solar system for pure Humans. But many Gennie groups, such as the Martian Desert Runners and Venusian Lowlanders, are now peaceful and fully realized cultures. Indeed, Gennies are a vital part of the NEO organization. And so you must race to assemble a Matrix Device for NEO, while keeping the technology out of PURGE's hands.

Aside from the storyline, there's nothing really new about *Matrix Cubed*. Anyone who's played *Countdown to Doomsday*, or AD&D titles such as *Pools of Darkness* or *Death Knights of Krynn*, will immediately recognize the *Matrix* gaming system. It's simple and straightforward, providing easy access to the game's role-playing mechanics. Although not as flashy or as graphically pleasing as other new gaming systems, it works well.

Again, as in *Countdown*, the combat system in *Matrix* is where the game really shines. You view battle scenes from a three-quarter, top-down perspective, enabling you to see where each member of your party stands in relation to the enemy. Because of this, strategic placement of your characters and maneuvers during battle often play more of a role than do hit-points and armor class. This strategic element is enormously satisfying, and vitally important. Master it quickly if you hope to survive long.

Compared to other new games in the genre, *Matrix Cubed* looks rather drab. But what it lacks in glitz it more than makes up for in substance. This game relies more on its intricate and wholly entertaining game-world than on any smoke and mirrors, leaving interface and mechanics to the proven, if aging, SSI system. The story is the real star here. If you fall under its spell, you'll be eager for a third installment.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, or Tandy graphics; hard drive required; supports AdLib, Roland, and Sound Blaster sound cards; supports mouse.

SIMANT: THE ELECTRONIC ANT COLONY

SELBY BATEMAN

Infest 70 percent of the house and yard, and the world is yours to command!

Life is cheap in the ant world — at least for *individual* ants. Every day brings another huge spider or a ravenous ant lion or a lawn mower that looks to be the size of Kansas. But one of the first things you learn in **Maxis Software**'s *SimAnt* is that the colony is king, and that a few hundred broken and dismembered ant bodies are a small price to pay when the fate of *millions* is at stake.

There's a lot more to learn in *SimAnt*; in fact, the program and the 176-page manual are fairly crawling with ant facts, ant lore, ant habits, ant behavior, ant history, antcetera, antcetera.

Maxis has a well-earned reputation for producing innovative PC simulations — products that mix entertainment with education in very creative ways. The groundbreaking *Sim City* helped define a new genre of computer entertainment that Maxis calls "software toys" or "system simulation toys." And subsequent "Sim" products from Maxis, including *SimEarth* and now *SimAnt*, continue to offer open-ended experimental environments.

Building your nest for future generations takes time, patience, and luck.

These latter two aren't really "games" as we generally think of them. Of course, there's a game element to *SimAnt* — but it's not really a strong point of the simulation. The beauty and value of *SimAnt* is in its playful approach to interactive learning. The more you experiment with *SimAnt*, the more you enjoy it and the more value you get from it. It is indeed a system simulation *and* a toy — and as with a toy, what you get out of it depends largely on what you bring to it.

In brief, designers Will Wright and Justin McCormick have created a world that you can manipulate in a wonderful variety of ways, consisting of a suburban backyard and house divided into 192 "patches," or areas, through which you guide your ants.

In the simulation's Full Game, you try to take over 70 percent of those patches. In the Quick Game and the Experimental mode, you operate your ants inside one patch. You search for food, build nests, raise young, protect the Queen, defend your turf, and head toward the house, where the *really* good food is kept.

In your path are hundreds of different obstacles — human feet, starvation, floods, angry red ants, hungry ant lions, insecticide (in the house), and a variety of other challenges.

Maxis has done its usual top-notch job with graphics and sound. And the game interface is flexible and easy to use. The window environment lets you adjust such factors as Behavior Control (forage, dig, nurse) and Caste Control (breeders, workers, soldiers). There are also windows or menu bars for all kinds of status, control, and viewing options — each of which can be accessed via a mouse or the keyboard.

The folks at Maxis have always taken a playful approach to their simulations (remember the Godzilla option in *SimCity*?), and *SimAnt* is no exception. The manual is replete with ant puns, jokes, cartoons, and quotes. In the program's Silly mode, thought bubbles pop up randomly among the ants, such as "Being a queen is terribly overrated," "Hey! Who turned out the lights?", and "If I lay another egg, I think I'll explode."

But beyond the playfulness is an astonishing array of information about ants. The program and the manual (including a bibliography and glossary) constitute a complete educational course on ants. Fully half of the manual is taken up with different chapters on the real world of ants — their chemistry, history, communication, hierarchies, and much more.

While *SimAnt* may not win any awards for game play in the traditional sense, there's no getting around the quality and the quantity of this simulation. But you must spend time with this program before you begin to soak up its real benefits.

SimAnt is a playground for anyone with an interest in science — and you can explore for fun or explore to learn. Either way, this electronic ant colony is a superb simulation.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; hard drive required; VGA, MCGA, EGA, Hercules or Tandy graphics; supports AdLib, Sound Blaster, SoundMaster, Roland, and Tandy sound cards; mouse optional but recommended.

SUPER TETRIS

TOM R. HALFHILL

It's not unusual for a hit computer game to be imitated by rival software companies and shareware programmers, but *Tetris* is a little different: its most memorable clones are the handiwork of the game's original author, Russian designer Alexey Pajitnov. Over the past five years, we've seen a steady stream of *Tetris* sequels and spinoffs, including *Welltris*, *Faces...Tris III*, *Wordtris*, and *Hatris*. Now there's another: **Spectrum HoloByte**'s *Super Tetris*.

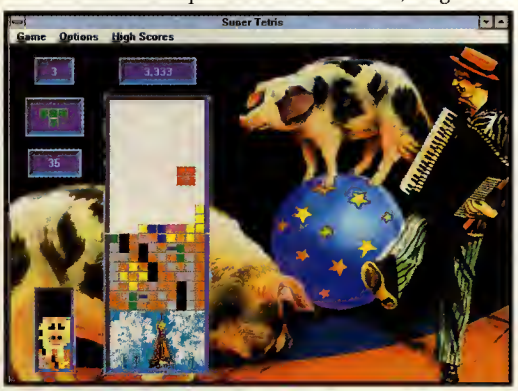
Each new game has varied little from the basic *Tetris* scheme — objects fall from the top of the screen, and you have to arrange them at the bottom before they pile back up to the top. It would all seem shamefully exploitive and creatively redundant if the games weren't so doggone addictive.

Believe it or not, *Super Tetris* does it again. Just when you thought it was safe to go back to real work on your computer, *Super Tetris* lures you away with more falling blocks and more insidious fun. If the Soviet Union hadn't already crumbled, one might suspect that *Tetris* was a Communist plot devised to tie up our computer systems. (To lend credence to this theory, *Super Tetris* even lets two players go head-to-head on a Novell network.)

Anyone who has played any previous variation of *Tetris* will adapt instantly to *Super Tetris*, and newcomers will catch on almost as quickly. You'll need the manual only to look up the copy-protection password and maybe, a little later, to study the finer points of the rules.

Just like all the other *Tetris* spinoffs, *Super Tetris* is easy to play but hard to master. In a throwback to the original *Tetris*, the falling objects are the same seven basic shapes, and once again you have to arrange them to form unbroken horizontal rows at the bottom of a pit. Whenever you form an unbroken row, it promptly disappears and you win points. This time, however, the pit is already half full with blocks. Your goal is to clear out those blocks by plugging the gaps in the rows.

To keep the game from becoming too easy, *Super Tetris* limits either the time you have to work with or the number of falling objects. If you run out of either resource, the game ends.



The falling blocks are identical to those in the original Tetris, but the screen is already half-full when you start. Your goal: eliminate all blocks at the bottom of the screen.

Each time you clear a row of blocks, a picture slides up from the bottom of the screen and some bombs drop down from above. You can use the bombs to destroy blocks.

But to keep the game from becoming too difficult, a cluster of bombs falls from the top of the screen whenever you clear a row, and you can steer the bombs to destroy certain blocks. Some blocks contain bonus items. When destroyed, they might give you another cluster of falling bombs or zap an entire row of blocks. Or if you're running out of falling shapes and still haven't cleared the screen, you can blow up certain bonus blocks to increase your supply of falling shapes. It all sounds more complicated than it really is.

Ultimately, *Super Tetris* is yet another *Tetris* clone. But that's not bad, because it clones more than just the look and the feel of the original game — it also clones the fun and the challenge.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; VGA, EGA, CGA, Tandy, or monochrome graphics; supports most sound boards; supports joystick and mouse. Also available for Microsoft Windows.

TWILIGHT 2000

WILLIAM R. TROTTER

There aren't a lot of squad-level combat games on the market, and even fewer that incorporate serious role-playing elements. In this department, sword-and-sorcery fans have a lot more to choose from than war gamers.

Twilight 2000, from **Paragon Software**, makes an ambitious attempt to claim this territory for its own. Based on a popular paper game of the same name, *Twilight 2000* takes place in a classic post-apocalypse setting of ruined cities and wilderness dotted with glowing zones of radioactivity. Across this devastated land, the surviving remnants of once-great armies struggle for turf and power, some led by idealists who want to rebuild civilization, others by rapacious warlords who would rather "rule in Hell than serve in Heaven."

Character-generation in Twilight 2000 *is awesomely detailed.*

The game is set in Poland, where people of German descent have formed ethnic clubs in hope of facilitating their emigration to Germany. It's a bit hard to follow, but it's not so ridiculously far-fetched that it significantly distracts from the realism.

Game players who relish character generation will have a feast with *Twilight 2000*. The game allows you to design your troops down to a very fine-grained level, with more than 50 assignable attributes and skills and 60-odd career options which help determine their usefulness in different situations. Moreover, the program insures that each character acts in a manner consistent with his or her abilities and inclinations.

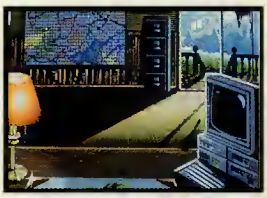
In combat missions, the player exercises control only over the team leader: the others in your outfit will react independently, responding to your commands according to their own agendas, values, and degrees of initiative. Characters grow and change, improve with experience, make mistakes, get wounded, and die.

Action takes place in two different modes: a first-person perspective when you're driving tanks, trucks, or jeeps and an overhead cutaway view once you strike out on foot. The 3-D vehicular mode is basically a good, solid simulation. Graphically and emotionally, the 3-D scenes are quite satisfying.

Much less successful are the overhead screens. The designers have chosen to present the on-foot action from an oblique, three-quarter-view perspective, and for us, it just didn't work.

Half the time, all you see on your screen is the top of someone's head moving at a 45-degree angle across one bottom corner, or a disembodied pair of boots crunching through the snow in a top corner. When your character is exploring buildings, you can't "flip" the screen to see the other side of the building, even if you need to *enter* the building in question — all you can do is grope blindly and listen to footsteps.

The extremely large scale of the figures does allow for outstanding detail, but it makes absolute hash of the combat system. Only a few square yards of terrain are displayed at a time, so your forces and the enemy won't be displayed simultaneously unless they're close enough to have at it with rocks and broken bottles. All you see is one little figure shooting, then another little figure shooting, so that even the hottest firefights have a bizarrely static quality. For all its crudities, Interstel's *D.R.A.G.O.N. Force* offered a much more exciting simulation of small-unit tactics; *Twilight 2000*'s firefights seem to take place in some sort of vacuum.



Each mission begins on this headquarters screen; you can also monitor your overall progress in the game from here.

Character control could stand improvement, too. When you enter a building to rendezvous with someone, the computer will respond to the Hail command only when both figures are in one precise alignment with one another — vexingly hard to do, when the character under the computer's control keeps moving aimlessly around the room.

In short, the vast amount of time and work it took to create a terrific character-generation program, beautifully shaded landscapes, and a reasonably satisfying vehicular combat mode are undermined by the frustrating and unrewarding squad-level missions.

Verdict: two-thirds of a good game. For some players, especially those who revel in the minutiae of character creation, this may be enough. For us, the frustrations of ground combat quickly turned game play into work.

GP

Hardware requirements: 640K minimum memory; hard disk required; VGA or MCGA graphics; supports AdLib, Roland, Sound Blaster, and Covox Sound Master; mouse or joystick recommended.

ACTIVISION RETURNS

Financially troubled **Mediagenic** has restructured with a new game plan. Now debt-free, the company has resurrected its **Activision** name. Stockholders under the new plan include **Philips, Sony Pictures, Nintendo,** and **International Consumer Technologies**. Peter Doctorow, formerly of Accolade, has joined the company as president of Activision Studios, the development arm of Activision.

Activision is developing software in PC, Macintosh, Amiga, Nintendo, and Sega Genesis formats. Its first titles include games from the legendary **Infocom**, a premier publisher of text-based adventure games that enjoyed great success in the mid-80s. Now a division of Activision Studios, Infocom has recently released *Leather Goddesses of Phobos II*, a campy science-fiction adventure laced with racy humor, and *The Lost Treasures of Infocom*, a collection of 20 best-selling Infocom titles. Also new from Activision is *Sargon V*, the latest release in the venerable computer chess series.

RECORD HEIGHTS FOR PC SOFTWARE

The **Software Publishers Association** announced that sales of PC software in North America hit a record high of $5.71 billion in 1991. Entertainment sales for 1991 were $309.4 million (a 19% increase over 1990 sales), while educational sales increased 37% over the previous year to $117.5 million.

Across all categories, PC software sales showed a 25.7% increase from '90 to '91, and sales of Macintosh titles gained 37%. In all other formats combined (Amiga, Apple II, Atari ST, Commodore 64/128, etc.), software sales declined in 1991 by 21.2% over the previous year.

NEW JOYSTICKS FROM SUNCOM

The Sabre analog joystick from **Suncom** is now available. Designed for intensive use, the Sabre features an aircraft-style grip and auto-fire. It comes with a two-year warranty and has a suggested retail price of $19.99. Also on the market from Suncom is the Merlin joystick, designed with a top-fire button for use by both right- and left-handed players. It carries a one-year warranty and a suggested retail price of $29.95.

Two new joysticks from Suncom: the Sabre (above) and Merlin

HORROR FROM CYBERDREAMS

Dark Seed, the first release from the newly formed PC software publisher **Cyberdreams**, is now available. A horror-adventure/role-playing game, *Dark Seed* is based on the artwork of Swiss surrealist **H.R. Giger**. Giger received an Academy Award for art design in the film *Alien*. His work can also be seen in *Poltergeist I* and the upcoming *Alien III*. Cyberdreams digitally scanned Giger's paintings to create the Dark World, a macabre biomechanical realm that the player must enter.

Other titles now in planning include *Cyber Race*, designed by **Syd Mead**, best known for his art design in the film *Blade Runner*, and *No Mouth* (working title), in development by science-fiction writer **Harlan Ellison**, whose stories have appeared on "The Twilight Zone," "Outer Limits," and "Star Trek."

Dark Seed

FOR EA SPORTS LOVERS

Electronic Arts has made memberships for its EASN (Electronic Arts Sports Network) Players Association available to the public. EASN titles are produced for all popular game formats, including personal computers, Super Nintendo, and Sega Genesis. Members will receive advance notice of new EASN games, with details and release dates; playing strategy hints; sports merchandise offers; and a Players kit, which includes an EASN ball cap, sunglasses, bumper sticker, school folder and pencil, John Madden ruler, embroidered patch, personalized membership card, SkyBox Series II NBA Trading Cards, and more. Memberships are available by sending $10.00 plus $4.50 shipping and handling to EASN Players Association, P.O. Box 7530, San Mateo, CA 94403-7530; or by calling 415-571-7171 (ext. 555).

EYE CONTROL

DreamPark Development has released *Inquisitor*, a utility for SSI's *Eye of the Beholder*. *Inquisitor* gives the player total control over character stats, attributes, skills, and possessions, and allows transformation of *Eye*'s two non-player characters into full characters. The player can also replace, modify, and enhance all treasures in the game, regardless of experience or magical ability. DreamPark also plans to release a similar product for *Eye of the Beholder II*. Suggested retail price is $29.95. For more information, contact DreamPark Development, 1175 Harrison Ave., Salt Lake City, UT 84105.

NEW SOUND, NEW STICK

A new PC sound card, **Ultrasound** from **Advanced Gravis**, is coming to market. Compatible with AdLib and Sound Blaster cards, Ultrasound features 16-bit digital audio, and accommodates up to 32 synthesized voices and up to 32 digital voices. Other features include 16 digital stereo channels, mono and stereo recording or sampling capability, 64K of on-card sound memory (expandable to 1 meg), MIDI support, on-card mixing of external CD audio, digital audio, synthesizers, microphone, and line inputs, and support of Windows Multimedia Extensions. Available in late spring, the Ultrasound's suggested retail price is $199.95.

Also new from Advanced Gravis is the **PC MouseStick**, an optical controller that functions as both a joystick and Microsoft- or Logitech-compatible mouse. The stick, a self-calibrating device, is bundled with a bus mouse card, game card, and a set of utility programs, including DOS and Windows mouse drivers. Suggested retail price for the MouseStick is $129.95.

Ultrasound from Advanced Gravis

EXPO FOR GAMERS

Coming this fall is the **Electronic Games Expo**, a consumer/trade show exclusively for manufacturers, retailers, and game players. The show, to be held September 25-27 at the Convention Center in San Jose, CA, will feature computer entertainment software, game peripherals, and video, portable, hand-held, and coin-op games. The first day is devoted to trade members only, and the last two days are open to the public. Admission price is $12.00. For more information, contact Electronics Conventions Management, 8110 Airport Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90045-3194.

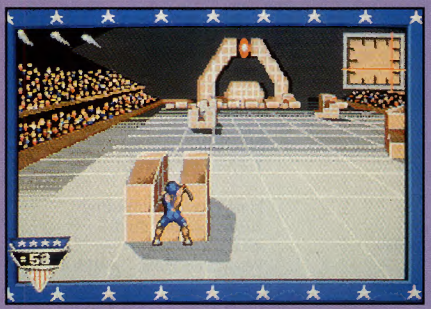
ON THE HORIZON...

Look for *Siege*, a fantasy strategic simulation from **Mindcraft** this summer. In *Siege*, the player controls troops — peasants, knights, elves, wizards, trolls, goblins, and spiders — in an effort to gain territory by assaulting and defending castles. The game includes scenario or campaign play options. Mindcraft is an affiliate of **Electronic Arts**.

A brand new EA affiliate, **Millennium**, will soon debut its first title, *Global Effect*, a world-strategy simulation based on the interaction of economic, industrial, environmental, and military factors. Gamers can choose to play under one of three scenarios: Save, Rule, or Create a world. The one- or two-player game features 64,000 separate locations. Millennium, based in Cambridge, England, developed two Sega Genesis games, *James Pond* and *James Pond II: Robocod*, for EA.

War gamers should be on the lookout for *Third Reich* from **Avalon Hill**. Based on the company's popular 18-year-old board game titled *Rise & Decline of the Third Reich*, this military strategy simulation encompasses all of World War II, including military, geographical, ideological, and economic factors.

Gametek is releasing two new PC titles, *American Gladiators* and *Daemonsgate I: Dorovan's Key*. *Gladiators* sold well in its Nintendo format, and Gametek plans to upgrade game play and graphics (256-colors are used) for the PC version. *Daemonsgate*, Gametek's first serious role-playing game, was in development by English-based **Imagitec** for over two years.

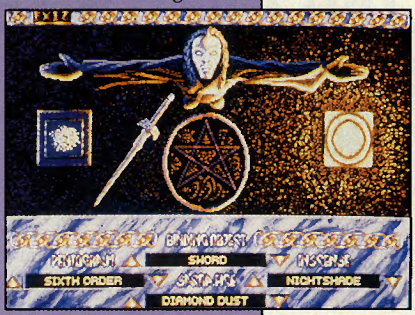


American Gladiators

Look for *Links 386 Pro* from **Access Software** in early July. This high-end version of the award-winning *Links* golf simulation is written in true 32-bit code for use on 386 and 486 machines only. And according to Access, *Links 386 Pro* is the first PC entertainment product to require Super VGA graphics.

Also on the way is *Might & Magic: Clouds of Xeen* from **New World Computing**. Although the game sports the same engine and interface as *III*, it features more developed voices and sound, a new premise, and a different world to explore. New World says that *Clouds of Xeen* is not a series installment.

Disney Software's new **Buena Vista** label is developing several titles, including *Unnatural Selection*, a game of genetic warfare, *Space Mountain*, a graphic adventure; *Route 66*, a panoramic travel game; and *Dog Eat Dog*, an ambitious-political adventure game that uses a form of neural networking in the program code. All of these titles should be available late this year or early '93.



Daemonsgate

Spectrum HoloByte's *Falcon 3.0* is a big game, but their upcoming *Warthog A-10* simulation will be even bigger and more ambitious. It's due out this fall.

Global Effect

DIRECTORY

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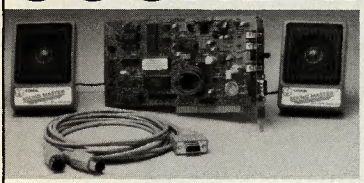

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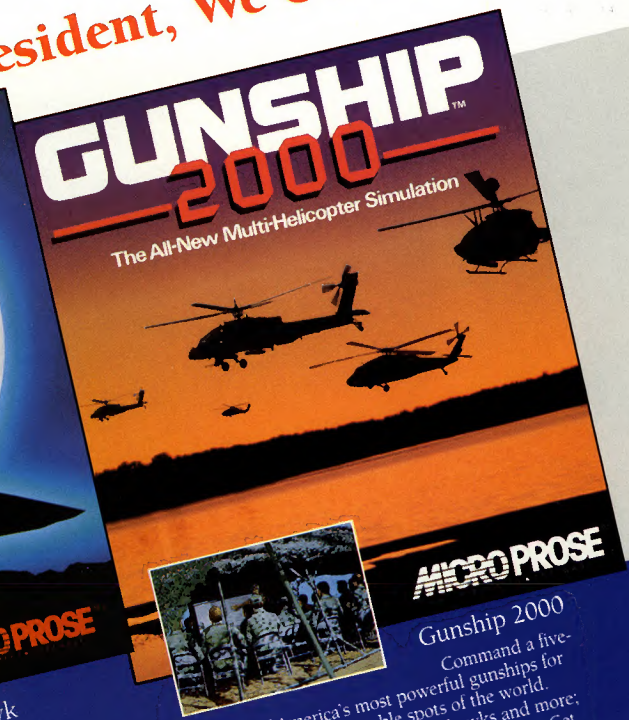

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